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SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS

1600



Acto. si vis quæ ducit
eā vitam

Camino de spiritu errado

Lxvii

Los Versillos siguientes declaran el modo de subir por la senda al Monte de perfeccion, y dan aviso para no ir por los dos caminos torcidos

Para uenir alogue no sabes
as de ir por donde no sabes.
Para uenir alogue no gustas
as de ir por donde no gustas.
Para uenir alogue no poses
as de ir por donde no poses.
Para uenir alo quonno eras
as de ir por donde no eras.

Para venir a saberlo todo
no quieras saber algo enredado
Para venir a gustarlo todo
no quieras gustar algo enredado
Para venir a poseerlo todo
no quieras poseer algo enredado
Para venir a serlo todo
no quieras ser algo enredado

Quando reparas en algo
deja de arrojarle el todo.
Porque para uenir del todo al todo
as de dejar del todo atodo.
Y quando lo uengas todo a tener
as de tenerlo sin nada querer.
Pasque si quieres tener algo entodo
no tienes puro en Dios tu tesoro.

*En esta densidad halla el
spiritu quietud, y descanso,
porque como nada codicia, nada
le impelle hacia arriba, y nada
le apriime hacia abajo, quæsta
en el centro de su humidid
Que quando algo codicia
en lo mesmo se fatiga*

SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS

1542-1591

DOCTOR OF DIVINE LOVE

AN INTRODUCTION TO
HIS PHILOSOPHY, THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY

BY

BEDE FROST

11

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TO
THE CARMELITE MARTYRS OF SPAIN
IN HONOUR OF
THEIR GLORIOUS FATHER
SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS
CONFESSOR AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

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ABBREVIATIONS

- A. The Ascent of Mount Carmel.
- D.N. The Dark Night.
- S.C. The Spiritual Canticle.
- L.F. The Living Flame of Love.
- S.T. Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas.

INTRODUCTION

IN studying the records of man's highest experiences two facts have to be kept in mind. First, that such experiences are incommunicable in themselves: they can be received by man since he is one both with God and with things, but they cannot be communicated save in and through a translation which, however apt it be, is not the original itself. This fact is obvious enough in common experience: our attempts to convey to another, say, the glory of a summer's sunset, the magnificence of the sight of Alpine peaks, the exquisite delight of music heard, find us stammering and losing ourselves in words the inadequacy of which we are only too painfully conscious. It is little wonder, then, that a purely spiritual experience, but incompletely understood by the recipient of it, should suffer a similar inhibition, as all those who have endeavoured to speak of such have known.

Second, in any attempt to relate or translate any great experience in the terms of the only language we possess, the form into which such translation will be cast will be one that is already known and familiar, it will be conditioned by such things as the religious, moral, scientific or æsthetic prepossessions which already dominate the mind and provide a medium through which the experience, to some small degree, is expressed. Thus although the same experience may be shared in by men of diverse types and temperaments, each one will, and can only express it through his own idiom, be it that of some theology, of art, music or literature. And this fact carries with it the consequence that only so far as the hearer or reader is familiar with the particular idiom through which the experience is conveyed will he be able to enter into and, in part at least, comprehend it. The deep experience of a Beethoven expressed in his symphonies and quartets may only be understood by one who is capable, both by temperament and education,

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of appreciating the musical medium employed. To expect the untutored and immature mind to "see" what Mozart or Donatello meant, as is the vain dream of the modern "educationalist" who drags groups of children to symphony concerts and art galleries, is the merest folly; only to him who knows the language will the truth enshrined be evident. Both these facts apply to the understanding of the great spiritual classics, among which stand the writings of St. John of the Cross, perhaps more so in his case than in some others, because his experience is largely cast in the terms of a philosophy and theology which, although of permanent truth and value, are not widely known in the present day. Hence arises the difficulty which many readers experience in coming to St. John, and it is this difficulty which the present volume endeavours to meet. If any comparison with so precious a gift of God, as Padre Silverio, who has given us the first definitive edition of the Saint's works, has called them, may be permitted, I would claim no more than that this book is as a skeleton to a living body, yet asking my readers to remember that even the beauty of a Helen of Troy rested on such a framework itself unbeautiful.

What I have attempted to do is to give the modern reader some idea of the philosophical and theological presuppositions in the language of which the Saint describes his own experience of the ascent of the soul to union with God so far as that union is attainable in this life, and, further, to underline the fact, upon which he insists, that the mystic state is a fulfilling and perfecting of human nature, in which, by the gift of contemplation, the intellect and will become capable of their highest activity, which in the former is not the act of reasoning but of intuition, here attaining to God who alone is the adequate object of the mind.

Since this work was begun, Professor Allison Peers has published his invaluable translation of the whole of St. John's writings which is a delight to read and which, for the first time, enables the English reader to know what the Saint said rather than what some of his editors and copyists thought that he ought to have said. All the

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references in this volume are to this translation, although much of the actual text has been made directly from the Spanish.

My warmest thanks are due to P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, C.D., to Professor Allison Peers, and to Messrs. Burns, Oates and Washbourne, for allowing me to use the definitive Spanish edition of St. John's works prepared by P. Silverio and published at Burgos in 1929.

My greatest hope is that this very elementary introduction will lead the reader to seize the opportunity now afforded of studying St. John in Professor Peer's edition, and thus to come in touch with that authentic flame of Divine love which suffuses all his teaching, as it consumed all his life.

BEDE FROST.

IN order to form a just estimate and appreciation of the lives and labours of most of the great saints of the Catholic Church it is necessary to see them against the background and in the *milieu* of the historical moment in which they lived and which, to more or less extent, coloured and determined their thought, teaching and activity. Ss. Paul, Athanasius, Augustine, Gregory, Bernard, Francis of Assisi and his namesake of Sales, Dominic, Charles Borromeo, Catherine of Siena, Peter Canisius, each unmistakably belongs to his own age; their lives and work are largely dominated by its fortunes, needs, controversies, hopes and fears, as, no less, each contributes his part to its vivid and tangled history, leaving indeed upon its pages even more indelible traces than many of those whose names are more familiar to the student of history.

It is true that there are notable exceptions to this fact, but none, perhaps, more striking than that of St. John of the Cross. Living as he did in one of the greatest centuries of the Christian era, and in the very centre of its greatness, he plays no part, humanly speaking, in that immense and stirring drama which filled the stage of sixteenth-century Europe. Nothing in his writings or in the slight contemporary references to him reveals the faintest interest in that interplay of vast political, economic, social and religious forces, so inextricably mingled, which strove together in that world writhing in the processes of disintegration and reformation. His portrait occupies no place in that gallery upon whose walls there hang the great men and women of the second half of the sixteenth century. Those fifty years, 1542-91, which witnessed the breaking up of Christendom, in which the flaming torch of war was carried from one end of Europe to the other, our great modern states came into being, the Muslim menace was finally defeated at Lepanto, Huguenot massacred Catholic on St. Bartholomew's Day of 1569 in

Navarre and themselves met the same fate three years later in Paris, Spain drove the Moors from their last stronghold in the Peninsula and lost the Netherlands, England, France and Spain strove for the mastery of the New World, which saw the first rise to power and the last begin to decline, the age of Charles IX and Philip II, Henry II and Catherine de Medici, Mary Tudor and Elizabeth, Charles V, Luther and Calvin, Don Juan of Austria, Drake and Raleigh, the Council of Trent and the Armada,—all this finds no echo, so far as we know, in the life of St. John.

Yet it would be far from the truth to imagine that this was due to ignorance or to think of St. John as an "enclosed" religious shut off from the world of which he had but the scantiest knowledge and less interest. At no period of his life does St. John correspond with that popular picture of a contemplative which is present in the modern mind. He was neither a gentle æsthete whose life was passed in quiet cloisters and chapels filled with dim religious light, nor a gloomy recluse gazing with jaundiced eye upon a world he had renounced. A man of the people, though his father was of noble birth who had married "beneath him," he was born in poor and hard surroundings, knew something of hunger and suffering from his earliest years. His father died when he was about seven years old and famine and poverty compelled his mother to move, first to Arevalo, where he was sent to work at a carpenter's, a tailor, a wood-carver and a painter. Later, it would seem when he was about twelve, his mother went to Medina del Campo, one of the leading commercial centres in Spain, where Juan went to school, served Mass, acted as sacristan at one of the churches and begged alms for his fellow-school children. A little older and until he took the Carmelite habit in his twenty-first year, he worked in the smallpox hospital, collected alms for the poor and attended the College of the Society of Jesus which had been recently established in Medina del Campo. Earlier than many, then, even of his day, he was in touch with the flowing tide of human life and affairs, at home in the narrow streets, the *plaza*, the *tiendas* and *fondas*, familiar with the sound

of several tongues, with the news of the world retailed by merchants, soldiers, priests, wandering minstrels and friars who, especially during the great fair, flocked to Medina from every part of Europe. In the November of 1564 he was sent to Salamanca where he took a three years' course in Arts, returning in 1567 for a year of theology. Salamanca, with its some 5000 students from all over Europe, had at this time eclipsed the fame of Paris as a centre of learning, and the influence exercised upon St. John by his studies under some of the greatest masters of the day will be seen later; here we are only concerned to note how *en rapport* with the doings of the world he must have been in that hive of young life throbbing with all the passions of the time. Granted that his mind was already, and to an unusual degree, set upon the things of God, all that we know of him would seem to negative the assumption that he passed through those crowded years oblivious of the world about him. We know how the turmoil of affairs affected St. Teresa, whom he first met in 1567 and who poured out her heart to her *Senequito* more than to any other, and we remember how many of the *conventos* of that day were, as she found, places where all the news and gossip of the day were retailed. Had St. John left such works as St. Teresa's *Foundations* and her *Letters*, what a mirror of the times we might have had from that keen observer of men St. John shows himself to have been.

Nor, bent as he was in restoring the primitive rule of prayer and solitude to the Carmelite Order, do we find much of the latter during the rest of his life. Dissuaded from becoming a Carthusian by St. Teresa, he helps to found the first house of the Reform at Duruelo in 1568, and found himself immersed in pastoral work amongst the poor of the surrounding villages. Rising at 4 a.m. the little community of three recited Matins, Lauds and Prime, made Mental Prayer, said their Masses, then spent the whole day evangelizing the country-side, only returning at nightfall, fatigued and hungry, to the miserable shelter which, however, they regarded as a second Bethlehem.

Two years later they move to Mancera and within the

next few months St. John founds two more monasteries of the Reform, one at Pastrana, the third at Alcalá. From the June of 1570 to 1572 he was occupied in these foundations, was "Master and Vicar" of the religious at Pastrana, then, in 1571, Novice-master at Alcalá, "the eighth wonder of the world" with its University of forty-two chairs, where, it is worthy of note, the reason for its being chosen as a site for the third house of the Reform was "both on account of the ease with which study might be carried on there, and also because there was better opportunity of obtaining distinguished members." Neither St. John nor St. Teresa ever confounded the contemplative life with a distrust of the intellectual life, in fact, it was the latter's desire for learned directors, the lack of which had caused her so much suffering, that prompted her strenuous efforts to establish reformed houses for men.

The next five years were spent by St. John as chaplain and confessor to the one hundred and thirty nuns of the convent of the Incarnation at Avila of which St. Teresa had just been made Prioress. These years must have been the quietest period of his whole life, in which, despite his numerous duties, he would find time for recollection and study, especially of the masters of the spiritual life whose teaching he had to convey to those under his charge. St. Teresa's witness to the learning and holiness of her young chaplain—he was only thirty when he came to Avila—is emphatic. "The Discalced Carmelite father who hears confessions here, Father John of the Cross, is doing much good: he is very holy," she wrote in 1573 to Father Gaspar de Salazar. "I seek here and there for light, and find all I need in my little Seneca" (*Senequito*, her favourite name for him), "he combines the widest experience with the deepest knowledge."

But the early peace of this period was soon to be disturbed, *una gran tempestad de trabajos*, a great storm of trials, foreseen by St. Teresa, was not long in breaking. The growth of the Reform movement was already exciting the suspicion of the Calced authorities and by 1575 persecution was active, a General Chapter of the Order held at Piacenza

ordering the closing of all the houses of the Reform but two. Two years later, on the night of December 3-4, 1577, St. John and his companion, Father Germano de Santo Maria, were seized and carried off to Toledo where they were accused of disobedience to both the Master-General and to the Chapter at Piacenza. St. John was imprisoned in a narrow cell some six feet wide by ten feet long with only a small window high up in the wall, given only bread and water to eat, was scourged by the friars in refectory, and deprived of Mass and the Sacraments. On the eve of the Assumption, 1578, he escaped and found refuge first with the Carmelite nuns of St. José and then at the hospital of *Santa Cruz*, where he seems to have remained, recovering from the rigours of his imprisonment, until the end of October when he was appointed Vicar of Monte Calvario by a General Chapter of the Discalced held at Almodóvar. Here, as we shall see, he began to write *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Spiritual Canticle*. The following year he founded the house at Baeza in Andalusia, becoming its first Rector, a post he held until March, 1581, during which time he regularly confessed the nuns at Beas, some twenty miles away, and continued his writing. Here active labours again engaged a large part of his time. Father Innocent of St. Andrew tells us that "when Father John of the Cross was Rector of the College of Baeza the confessors were in the confessional day and night, and could not manage to confess everybody." Rich and poor alike flocked to him, and he who had given himself so entirely to God found in that giving the most intense charity for his neighbour.

From 1582-88 he was Prior of Granada, an arduous post beset by poverty, where he did much building, often working at it himself, directed the community, preached to and confessed the townspeople as well as visiting the nuns at Beas and other convents, and finishing his treatises. In 1585 he was made Vicar-Provincial of Andalusia and assisted at the foundation of several new houses, and in 1588 became Prior of Segovia, now the central house of the Reform. During this time he was constantly journeying from one part of

Spain to another; one such journey alone took him from Malaga to Toledo, Granada, Madrid and back to Granada, some twelve hundred miles in the height of a Spanish summer.

Nicholas Doria, now Vicar-General, with "full, free and absolute power to make such statutes and ordinances as he should think fit . . . as also to change, partly or entirely, whatever he might find necessary," opened the first General Chapter of the Reform at Madrid in June, 1588. St. John was not re-elected to any post, his offer to go to Mexico was rejected and he was sent to Peñuela in disgrace, his fault being that he had opposed Doria's determination to carry on the Reform on his own lines. Attempts were unsuccessfully made to ruin his reputation; on September 12 he fell ill of a fever, and as there was neither doctor nor medicine at Peñuela, he was asked to choose between going to Baeza or Ubeda. He chose Ubeda, where after much suffering he died on December 14, 1591.

The above brief survey of St. John's life has been given with but one purpose, that of establishing the very active character of his life, and to show that his silence and apparent lack of knowledge of and interest in contemporary history can hardly have been due to actual ignorance but had a far more fundamental source. From his early years he was drawn to a life of solitude, prayer and penance. God and the realities of the spiritual world were even more to him than to those amongst whom he moved, and there were few in the Spain of his day who, even if they were open sinners, doubted the reality of the things of the Faith. The Society of Jesus, newly-founded and attracting many ardent disciples, taught him much, but there are no signs that he thought of entering it. Even the Carmelite Order did not satisfy him and he would have asked to be transferred to the Carthusians had it not been for his meeting with St. Teresa which determined the whole future of his life. Yet, as will appear, it was no contempt for or Buddhist-like attitude towards the world which filled his mind, it was the tremendous, dominating thought of the high majesty of God in comparison with whom all creatures are as nothing,

of the vast, impassable gulf which exists between the Creator and the creature, a gulf which St. John saw as ever being widened by the sin which, as the waves of it eddied around his ardent soul, seemed to be sweeping the whole world to destruction. But in no other country than Spain, unless in what is now Austria, was another fact, that of the Passion, held so constantly before the eyes of men, and inseparable from the Crucifix, the image of the sorrowful Mother of God, her heart one with that of her Son, Victim of the world's salvation, and full of pity as His for the children He had given her in the third word from the cross. It was in such light that St. John saw the world, as a fallen creature capable of and needing redemption, a work in which he, as a member of the Mystical Body of Christ in and through which the Passion is continued in time, and its fruits conveyed to the souls of men, must take his part. And that part for him meant, he knew, such an embracing of the cross as would involve a veritable martyrdom. To him the Religious Life was no mere refuge from the world, a quiet retreat where in ordered prayer and study a man might be freed from the chances and miseries which the world suffered, it was, on the contrary, the very heart of the Body of Christ wherein the fiery energy of Divine Love gathered itself up in human hearts uniting them to the Passion of the Lord and reproducing in each age and in countless souls the Three Hours of the cross, hours of darkness, suffering and silence, of divine patience and divine activity. That, he saw, was the need of the world; an Apostolic ministry in any age could be none other than that of the great Apostle himself. To be "crucified with Christ," "by whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world," to be "determined not to know anything save Jesus Christ and Him crucified," "to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord . . . that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death," all this, so diluted and reduced in the common religion of our time, was the foundation of St. John's life in which there had been

cultivated that "habitual desire to imitate Christ in all that He does" of which he writes in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* as the primary necessity for the overcoming of those desires which hinder the soul in its early steps toward God. And to this he adds, "in order that he may be able to do this well, every pleasure which presents itself to the senses, if it be not purely for the honour and glory of God, must be renounced and completely rejected for the love of Jesus Christ, who in this life had no other pleasure, neither desired such, than to do the will of His Father, which He called His meat and drink." If we remember that St. John spent about four of the most impressionable years of his life at the school of the Society of Jesus in Medina del Campo we can hardly avoid the supposition that the teaching of the Fathers there had exercised a great influence upon him, for the words quoted above from *The Ascent*, words which we know were frequently repeated by him, since they are to be found among the maxims which it was his custom to write on slips of paper and give to those whom he directed, bear a striking resemblance to those in the *Meditation on the Kingdom of Christ*, that of the *Two Standards* and the *Third Degree of Humility* in the *Spiritual Exercises*. It can hardly be questioned that St. John must have been familiar with them and with the *Book of Exercises for the Spiritual Life* of the Benedictine, Garcia de Cisneros, which appeared in 1500, and became widely popular, making a deep impression upon Ignatius of Loyola who was given these Exercises by Dom Jean Chanones at Montserrat soon after his conversion.

St. John, then, was no mere dreamer, nor quiet scholarly soul by temperament led to ignore the world about him, but a virile man of affairs, as two or three of his few extant letters show, who, however, had trained and disciplined himself to the exclusion of all that was not immediately necessary to "the one thing needful" which filled the whole of his life, the attaining of that union with God which the Faith had ever taught is the purpose of man's creation, the object of his redemption, and the perfection of each human life. He has all the Spanish passion for unity, for life at its fullest, for

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the doing of great things. "I despise what is possible and seek the difficult," says one of Lope de Vega's characters. "Strive always to choose, not that which is easiest, but that which is most difficult," is the first counsel St. John gives for that mortifying and calming of the four natural passions by which the soul is re-created in its original unity. All his doctrine of renunciation is but a means of denuding the soul of that which hinders and destroys its natural capacity to be "filled with all the fulness of God." "Crucified inwardly and outwardly with Christ, a man will live in this life with fulness and satisfaction of soul." "He that knoweth how to die in all things will have life in all things." With all the saints he is consumed with the passion for that life of which Jesus Christ said, "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly." If, again, in common with them, he cries, "I die because I do not die," seeing

This life that has been giv'n to me
Is but true life's negation—nay,
'Tis death that comes with each new day
Until I live, my God, with Thee.

This is from no morbid view of life, but from a vivid consciousness of a supernatural life already possessed to the full fruition of which death is the lifting of the last veil, the breaking of

The web of this sweet encounter

for which the soul prays in *The Living Flame of Love*, so that "I may be able to love Thee with the fulness and satisfaction which my soul desires" (stanza i, 30). .

And in this the saint is as Spanish as he is Catholic, for to the Spaniard death is essentially "life-giving" as more than one poet speaks of it. It is life, not death, which triumphs, as may be seen in Spanish literature, art and religion, as, for instance, in the way they celebrate Good Friday, not with the dull, funeral-like decorousness we are familiar with, but in the consciousness of the exuberance of life victorious blazing through the broken body of the

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Crucified, around which rise the triumphal strains of the *Pange Lingua* and the *Vexilla Regis*.

Pange lingua gloriosi
Lauream certaminis
Et super crucis trophaeo
Dic triumphum nobilem :
Qualiter Redemptor orbis
Immolatus vicerit.

It is this insistence on life in the fullest sense which dominates and penetrates all St. John's writings of which it is as true to say, as P. Watrigant does of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, that they were lived before being written, for even to a greater extent than the *Exercises*, St. John's works are the record of his own personal experience of the ways of God with souls who give themselves entirely to Him. Thus his attitude toward the world and its affairs is quite other than that of one who, for one reason or another, simply is not interested in them. In his instructions concerning the active purgation of the memory (*Ascent*, III), he says that "the spiritual man . . . must be careful not to stir up or collect in his memory any of the things that he hears, sees, smells, tastes or touches, but must allow himself to forget them immediately." The full meaning and scope of this must await later consideration ; it is only mentioned here as giving a fundamental reason for the saint's apparent lack of interest in the world about him. He had learnt that in order to attain to that union with God which is possible in this life, a man must be dead not only to sin, as the apostle teaches, but to the world, excluding from his mind all that does not, in the path of his vocation, contribute to the *unum necessarium*, to love God with all his heart and mind and will and strength. To be "crucified with Christ" was no metaphor or poetic expression to him but sober reality, the words of the beloved disciple rang in his ears with the accent of truth, untainted with the evasions and compromises with which their meaning is commonly glossed. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father

is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John ii, 15-17).

To understand St. John's teaching, then, we must understand the man himself, since, although his doctrine is founded and flows in the great stream of Catholic spirituality, there is an originality about it which proceeds from the unique character, vocation and experience of the Saint himself. Without such an understanding, which Father Bruno's *Life of St. John* now makes more possible than had hitherto been (although we may still hope for something less diffused and more balanced), it will be, as it has been, as easy to fall into error about both the Saint and his teaching as has been so common in the case of St. Francis of Assisi.

No less must we free our minds from that conception of the mystic and Contemplative Life which confounds the Catholic mystic with the Eastern "adept," or, with that of some modern non-Christian writers, who imagine that the mystics are concerned with an experience of the universe as a whole. Of the former Mr. G. K. Chesterton has well said, "No two ideals could be more opposite than a Christian Saint in a Gothic cathedral and a Buddhist Saint in a Chinese temple. The opposition exists at every point; but perhaps the shortest statement of it is that the Buddhist Saint always has his eyes shut (reasonably, he adds later, because he is looking at that which is I and Thou and We and They and It), while the Christian Saint always has them very wide open. . . . The Buddhist is looking with a peculiar intentness inwards. The Christian is staring with a frantic eagerness outwards" (*Orthodoxy*, pp. 241 ff.). Of the latter it is sufficient to say that the very foundation of Christian mysticism, and no one more emphasizes it than St. John, is the existence of a God transcendent and uniquely other than creatures, whom it would think the highest blasphemy to confound with the work of His hands.

Nor must the Contemplative Life be confused with that

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of enclosed religious, or deemed incompatible with a life of many and varied activities. On the contrary, the great mystics of the Church who have received the gift of contemplation have all been immersed in Apostolic labours of one kind or another. St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Gregory the Great, St. Bernard and St. Bonaventure, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic, St. Thomas Aquinas, the two Catherines of Italy, St. Francis of Sales and St. Jane Frances de Chantal, St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, all lived lives of crowded activity, born of and flowing from that contemplation which is the true source of the dynamic and enduring character of the lives and labours of the Saints. And it is so because in contemplation the whole man is centred on God alone, and in that "sight of the Beginning," "the contemplation of Divine Truth," as St. Thomas Aquinas defines it, is not only raised above the temporal and material but in seeing all things in God with whom he is in closest union, the contemplative sees and understands things as they are in reality, realizes their true place and value and thus moves amongst and deals with them with something of the mind and spirit of the Creator Himself. Both the ascetic preparation which fits the soul to receive the gift of contemplation, and the act itself, which St. John describes as "an infused and loving knowledge of God, which enlightens the soul and at the same time enkindles it with love, until it is raised up step by step, even unto God its Creator" (*D.N.* II, xviii, 5) frees the whole man from that entanglement in the flux of time and temporal things so that he is no longer blinded and deceived by them, and moreover, as St. John says, there is revealed "the beauties of their being, virtue, loveliness and graces, and the root of their duration and life. . . . And although it is true that the soul is now able to see that these things are distinct from God, inasmuch as they have a created being, and it sees them in Him, with their force, root and strength, it knows equally that God, in His own Being, is all these things, in an infinite and pre-eminent way, to such a point that it understands them better in His Being than in themselves. And this is the great

delight of this awakening: to know the creatures through God and not God through the creatures" (*L.F.* IV, 5).¹

By contemplation all our human activity is purified, enlightened, strengthened and saved, as Maritain has said, from that subjection "to time in which it takes place and disappears. . . . To the extent that the order of charity still falls short of perfection in man, to that extent exterior activity, not proceeding as it ought from adhesion to God, runs the risk of squandering the substance of man in accordance with the rhythm of matter and impeding the progress by which, under the impulse of God, man builds himself. . . . Things only go as they ought, if man, while steadily increasing the exercise of the virtues, simplifies his exterior activity, restricts it to what the order of charity requires, rids it of that sort of pertness and presumption, that vagabond, disorderly and childish manner which is an illusion of life. . . . Once he has submitted to the habitual discipline of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and to the extent he participates in the perfect life, then and to that extent the exterior activity proceeds in him, as it ought, from adhesion to God, supervenes by way of addition, not subtraction, then, so far from being a deficiency or an impediment, it is a superabundance" (*The Things that are not Cæsars*, pp. 110-12).

But it must not be supposed that the gift of contemplation is to be desired as an aid to spiritual efficiency. The central, dominating fact in the lives of the Saints is that they seek after God for Himself alone, because He is God, the End, Fulfilment and Perfection of the rational creature, not simply an accessory to human needs. "God alone must be

¹ To say that "God is all things" is not synonymous with all things are God. St. John has already stated that "things are distinct from God," so that when he adds that He is "all these things" he qualifies the words by going on to say "in an infinite and pre-eminent way." He does not mean, then, that God is the formal or common being of all things but that all exist in and by Him, who is the First Cause and reason of all. St. Thomas quotes Dionysius to the effect that "God in His one existence prepossesses all things," and adds "all created perfections are in God . . . since as the first effective cause of things, the perfections of all things must pre-exist in God in a more eminent way." Dionysius implies the same when he says of God, "It is not that He is this but not that, but that He is all, as the cause of all" (*S.T.* I, iv, 2).

the object of our search and attainment" (A. II, vii, 3). "He that will love some other thing together with God of a certainty makes little account of God" (A. I, v, 4). No one who is familiar with Holy Scripture will be astonished at such teaching. "The Lord thy God is a jealous God," "Thou shalt have no other gods but Me." "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like unto Me." "I am the Lord: that is My Name: and My glory will I not give to another." To seek God is to live, "Seek after God and your soul shall live." "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." "He that seeketh his life shall lose it." "Abide in Me and I in you, so shall ye bring forth much fruit, and your fruit shall remain." St. Ignatius of Loyola has condensed the whole of it into one sentence. "Man was created to praise, reverence and serve God, and by this means to save his soul." To make anything else the end of life, even the salvation of one's own soul or that of others, is to defeat the very purpose one has in view. The Saints, without exception, accomplished the great and permanent works they did solely because they did not set out to do them but only, as St. Benedict says, "to truly seek God." Their spiritual efficiency and the fruit it produced was a consequence of their being consumed with the desire for God Himself. "Aflame to gaze upon His Beauty," as says St. Gregory, filled with the one desire of the Psalmist, they gave themselves all-entirely to such seeking after God that all other desire died within them, so that, emptied of all which could impede their union with God, they were capable of receiving all that He willed to bestow upon them and, "filled with all the fulness of God" overflowed in charity and service towards their neighbour.

There is, then, no incompatibility between contemplation and action: one is but fruit of the other. And it is because no activity is worth anything which does not proceed from charity, as the Apostle so emphatically teaches, that those whom God had chosen to do great things for Him, were—and are—first led to seek Him with their whole heart, having

no other thought or desire than to conform themselves to His mind and will. So St. Benedict fled to the solitude of Subiaco, St. Bernard to the poor and remote monastery of Cîteaux as earlier St. Paul had retired to the desert after his conversion and later St. John of the Cross embraced the life of a Carmelite and even thought of becoming a Carthusian. None of them had any thought of that vast activity in which their lives were to be consumed, they did not look upon what they did as a preparation for such activity, they but sought God and did His will simply as it came to them step by step. Meditating upon the law of the Lord day and night, having the Life and Passion of their Lord constantly before their eyes, they sought nought but to be forgotten and despised for His sake that thus they might imitate Him whose Name they bore, find, as did He, their meat and drink in the accomplishment of the Divine Will. Thus they became, each in the way which God willed, the instruments through which that Will operated amongst men; conformed to Christ crucified they "bore the marks of the Lord Jesus," not always as St. Francis of Assisi, in the body, but always in such manner that men saw and were drawn to venerate the wounds of divine love in the servants of the Crucified. Of none was this more true than of St. John of the Cross who was called to so intimate and deep participation in the Passion of Christ since he was to be, in a very special manner, not only the guide of those who should have the desire and courage to tread the highway of Mount Carmel in the most perfect detachment of the spirit from all that is not God, but himself the victim of divine love who should establish the Reform of the Carmelite Order upon the solid and enduring basis of sacrifice, suffering and the total abnegation of self. The whole of his life reveals how deeply he knew that there was no activity so powerful as that of the Passion of Christ, no prayer more mighty than that of the lifting up of the holy hands of Jesus, stretched out and nailed high upon the cross, nothing of more worth to God and man than that one should be so "crucified with Christ" as was the sorrowful Mother on Calvary, no way to God more sure than

that of the *Via dolorosa*, no higher call to the Christian than to be made one with the Passion of the Lord, and so a living channel by which the grace of that Passion might flow to the souls of men. What reform of a religious order could there be which was not the fruit of the immersion of the reformer in that Passion which alone redeemed and re-formed the souls of men? That, I think, he saw in those moments of his first meetings with St. Teresa in which she, discerning that here was the very man she needed, poured out her heart to him and won him to that work to which he was henceforth to give his life. And with St. John, to see was to act, "*Obras, que no palabras*"—deeds not words, was as much his motto as of St. Teresa. Some years later he wrote to the nuns at Beas: "My not having written has not been for lack of willingness, for truly I desire your great good, but because it seems to me that enough has already been said and written for the accomplishment of what is needful; and that what is lacking (if anything be lacking) is not writing or speaking, for of this there is generally too much, but silence and work . . . when a person once understands what has been said to him for his profit, he needs neither to hear or say more, but rather to practise what has been said to him carefully and silently, in humility and charity and self-contempt."

Yet convinced as he was that the life of prayer and penance, solitude and contemplation was an Apostolate in itself, as his twentieth-century disciple, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, was to show, we have evidence that he was one with the common tradition of the Church as expressed by St. Thomas, of the superiority of the mixed to the purely contemplative life. "Absolutely and in itself," says the Angelic Doctor, "the contemplative life is better than the active life," summing up the long tradition which goes back to Aristotle and is explicitly taught by St. Augustine and St. Gregory the Great. But St. Thomas concludes his discussion upon the merits of the two lives by saying that the mixed life is the most perfect, not only as being that chosen by our Lord but "as it is a greater thing to give light to others than merely to see light oneself, so it is a greater

thing to hand on the results of one's contemplation to others than simply to contemplate " (S.T. II, II, clxxxviii, 6). The Carmelite Fathers of Salamanca, in their teaching on *The Religious State*, follow St. Thomas, saying, " The mixed life is immediately ordained to the contemplation and love of God, which is the end of the purely Contemplative Life, so that in this it is not inferior to it ; but further, as by the spreading of this knowledge and love of God, it is occupied in the salvation of souls, *propter Deum*, this raises the mixed life above that of the life purely contemplative." St. John says that " the exercise of preaching is spiritual rather than vocal. For although it be practised by means of outward words, its power and efficacy reside not in these but in the inward spirit. . . . It is a common matter of observation that, so far as we can judge here below, the better is the life of the preacher, the greater is the fruit he produces " (A. III, xlv, 2, 4). And despite his marked vocation to the Contemplative Life, we find in him, from the days at Duruelo until the end of his life, no hesitation in undertaking the varied activities given to him. As he had given himself utterly to God so he gave himself unsparingly to his neighbour, and this all the more perfectly since the order of the two great commandments was never lost sight of or inverted by him. Father Eliseus of the Martyrs, who had known St. John intimately when the Saint was Prior of *Los Mártires* in Granada, tells us that he had heard him commenting on the text, " Know you not that I must be about My Father's business? " to the effect that this business must be interpreted as meaning the redemption of the world and the good of souls, quoting the saying of Dionysius the Areopagite, " Of all divine things the most divine is to co-operate with God in the salvation of souls." " The supreme perfection of every creature," said the Saint, " according to his degree in the hierarchy, consists in imitating God, each according to his talents and resources ; but that which is most admirable and divine, is to be His co-worker in the conversion and return of souls to God. God's own work shines forth in this and it is an infinite glory to imitate Him. There is no truth more

evident than that charity for our neighbour grows in the degree that the soul is united to God by love. For the more it loves, the more it desires that this same Master should be honoured and loved by all men; and the more that desire increases, the more it works to bring about that end, both in prayer and in all the ways which it is able to undertake. The fervour of charity in such souls who are thus so filled with God becomes so great that it is impossible for them to content and limit themselves to their own personal advantage. To go to heaven alone seems to them but a little thing, they are full of a passion of doing all they can, by desires, heavenly tenderness, and the most delicate zeal, to lead many others with them to blessedness. Such is the effect of their great love for God which has its source in perfect prayer and contemplation."

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This was, indeed, the ideal of the Carmelite Reform inaugurated by St. Teresa and St. John.

In its early days on Mount Carmel the Order was eremitic and almost purely contemplative: "Rarely," says Blessed Nicholas le Français, in the *Flèche Ardente*, "did they leave the hermitage," although they were not unmindful of the needs of their neighbour. Little is known of those early days; it is not until we come to *The Institution of the First Monks*, an anonymous work, probably of the thirteenth century, that we have the end of the Order clearly stated.

"This life has a double end, we acquire the first by our labour and virtuous effort aided by Divine grace. It consists in offering to God a holy heart, free from all taint of actual sin. We attain this end when we are perfect and in Cherith, that is, hidden in the charity of which the Wise Man says 'Love covereth all sins' (Prov. x, 12). God, willing that Elias should attain this end, said, 'Hide thyself by the brook Cherith' (1 Kings xvii, 3). The other end of this life is communicated by the pure gift of God: not simply after death, but already in this mortal life, I mean, to taste in a certain manner in the heart and experience in the spirit the power of the Divine presence and the sweetness of the

glory of the highest, that which is called, to drink of the river of the pleasures of God (Ps. xxxvi, 8). God proposed this end to Elias, saying, 'There thou shalt drink of the brook.' It is in view of this double end that the monk ought to give himself to the eremitic and prophetic life." The last words suggest that some activity of preaching and teaching was not excluded and the facts of the life of Elias, whom tradition claims was the founder of Carmel, would seem to confirm this.

Canonical recognition of the Order was sought for and obtained from the Patriarch of Jerusalem some time between 1206-14, who approved a Rule which included obedience to the Prior, life in separate cells, continual prayer, the recitation of the Divine Office or of Paternosters by those unable to read, the building of an oratory in the midst of the cells in which they might hear Mass daily, the holding of a Chapter every Sunday, the keeping of the fast from the Exaltation of the Cross until Easter, perpetual abstinence, manual labour, and the observance of silence from Vespers to Terce.

This Rule was confirmed by Honorius III in 1226 and three years later Gregory IX enforced the strict rule of poverty. The first house in the West was established by Pierre de Corbie at Valenciennes in 1235, and the Saracen menace in 1237 led to several other houses being founded in the following years: two in England, of which the best known was that of Aylesford in Kent, where the first Western Chapter was held in 1247 and St. Simon Stock elected Prior-General. Up till now the Rule of St. Albert had been kept by the newly-founded houses, but St. Simon Stock at once sought the Papal permission for certain modifications, which Innocent IV accorded. It seems likely that Dominican influence drew the Carmelites of this time from the more Carthusian mode of life which they had hitherto practised. From the desert they flowed to the city; between 1247 and 1260 houses were established at Cambridge, Oxford, Paris and Bologna. The Order grew rapidly, producing Saints, masters of theology, Papal legates and commanders of the armies against the Saracens in Palestine. Further mitigations of the Rule were

allowed by Eugenius IV in 1440, one consequence of which was the Reform accomplished by Blessed Jean Soreth, who after holding several offices in the Order was elected Governor-General in 1451. Not that the mitigations were the sole cause: the incidence of the Black Death which raged throughout Europe in 1348 and 1349 no doubt affected the *morale* of the Order as it did that of the whole of the Church and of society. Yet the primitive spirit of Carmel was still alive, though for many years that conflict between those who wished to hold to the ancient Rule of St. Albert and those who, no doubt influenced by the great need of an active Apostolate, wished to take advantage of the mitigations which the Popes had approved, caused great and continuous difficulties which were only finally resolved after the attempt of Nicolas Doria of Jesus-Mary in 1586 to bind the Discalced to a more severe observance than even St. Teresa had wished.

The first Carmelite nuns were established by Blessed Jean Soreth in 1452 and it was with their reform that St. Teresa was primarily concerned. The need was evident. The Abbé Hoornaert, in his fascinating study of *St. Teresa in Her Writings*, gives a striking picture both of the background of political and social life of the sixteenth century and of that of the Carmelite convents in Spain, the latter largely taken from the writings of the Saint herself. "Life in the convent of the Incarnation at Avila when Teresa entered it at the age of twenty was easy enough . . . each nun had her own oratory which she decorated and adorned with paintings according to her own taste ; she was at liberty to have feasts celebrated there, in very solemn fashion at times, in honour of the Saint of her choice. These feasts often turned into fashionable little concerts, when the nuns took pleasure in having their own sentimental ditties appreciated. . . . But the *locutorio* was the place most appreciated of all. . . . There lady friends were welcomed, introductions made, and more than one gallant given encouragement ; . . . the gossip of the city and the latest war-news was discussed : even Platonic love was talked, and elegant methods of speaking practised."

All this, which sounds so astonishing to our ears and, no doubt, as well as marking a great decadence in religious life, led to greater evils, of which St. Teresa does not scruple to hint in the broadest terms (*Life*, vii, 5-9), must yet be seen in the light of the sixteenth and not of the twentieth century. Just as for centuries the monasteries had been the great inns of the times, constantly full of such travellers who sought more fitting accommodation and company than was to be found in the ordinary hostelries, so the convent parlours became the precursors of the later *salon*, where the more educated met and discussed the events of the day and current movements in art, literature, philosophy and religion. Abuse—and that a grave one—it was, but it had become so accepted a thing that even St. Teresa hardly perceived it at first. This is not the place for the story of how the need for the Reform came to her, but only to note that when she set her hand to the tremendous task of leading the Carmelite nuns back to the ancient ideal of the Order, she had in her mind, not simply the ideal of the Contemplative Life as such but of that life as a real apostolate of souls. Viewing the heresy and sin-stricken world of her day, her great heart cries out, “It seemed to me, I would have given a thousand lives to save only one of those souls who were being lost. . . . Oh, my sisters in Jesus Christ! Help me to ask this grace of our Lord. It is to this end that He has brought you all here, this is your work, and to this all your desires should tend” (*Way of Perfection*, i, 3, 4).

But if all this was to be accomplished she must have priests and directors who were imbued with the spirit of Carmel, as well as with knowledge and discretion. These she first found in Padre Antonio de Heredia and St. John, the latter so slight and frail compared to the former, that she spoke of them as “a friar and a half” with which to begin the reform, the fruits of which will endure for all time.

To say of both St. John and St. Teresa that they were great, heroic lovers is to pronounce the deep secret of their undying lives and teaching. Both bear, too, the spirit of

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Spain's patron, St. James of Compostella, no less than of their father Elijah, the spirit of Spain herself which once made her great, and will, when she succeeds in freeing herself from the illusions and falsehoods of the passing moment to which in common with the nations of to-day she has enslaved her religion, and with it her culture and freedom, enable her to become truly great once more. They might have lived in any age but they would ever have been unmistakably one with those whose names contain and bring to mind the essence of Spanish character, religion, art and literature.

It is in this very characteristic that a reason, additional to that of the position St. John occupies as Saint and Doctor of the Church, exists for commending his teaching to English Christians. It is that there exists a greater likeness between English and Spanish spirituality than between that of our own and any other. The English mystics of the fourteenth century, together with Father Baker in the sixteenth, have far more affinity with those of Spain than with those of Flanders, France or Italy, an affinity common to them all, but perhaps most marked in *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Both in the English and Spanish writers there is a complete freedom from any form of Pantheism, so narrowly, if successfully avoided by Eckhart, Boehme and Angelus Silesius ; a deep mysticism united to a virile asceticism ; the true relationship between the world and God is never obscured, the freedom of human choice and the necessity of will-union with God is emphasized, together with the right relation between prayer and activity, a devotion to the Sacred Humanity of our Lord as deep as it is different to that of St. Bernard or St. Francis of Assisi, and a constant demand for that heroic, "caballerisco" spirit, so characteristic of St. John, St. Ignatius and of St. Teresa. Nor must we forget that St. John's philosophical and theological education, although mainly Thomistic, seems also to have been influenced by the teaching of Michael of Bologna and the English John Bacon, known as *Doctor Resolutus*, possibly more by the latter than the former.

As is well known, the prose writings of the Saint are

expositions of poems which he began to write in the prison of Toledo, some chapters of *The Ascent*, having been begun, probably, when he left Calvario for Baeza. These were continued and *The Spiritual Canticle* begun at Baeza and El Castellar, whilst *The Ascent* and the rest of his works were completed at Granada. No certain reason can be given for the unfortunately unfinished state of *The Ascent* and *The Dark Night*; the most probable one would seem to be that as he began *The Spiritual Canticle* before the former books, or rather book, for they form one whole, was finished, he thought that the *Canticle* contained that which, had he had more time and desire to perfect his work, would naturally have completed *The Dark Night*. A full treatment of the whole question may be found in the first volume of Padre Silverios' edition of the Saint's works (Burgos, 1929), a sufficient abridgment of which is given in Vol. I of Professor Peer's translation (Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1934).

THE difficulties which many modern readers of St. John find in the way of understanding his teaching are due to a variety of causes, the principal of which will be considered in this chapter.

I. The first lies in the subject itself, which, as the Saint himself says, "relates to the dark night through which the soul must go to God," so that the reader must not "marvel if it seem to him somewhat dark also. This, I believe, will be so at the beginning; but as he passes on he will find himself understanding the first part better, since one part will explain another. And then, if he read it a second time, I believe it will seem clearer to him and the instruction will appear sounder" (*A.*, Prologue, viii).

It is essential, then, that we should see what is the main intention and end St. John has in mind, since it is the end which gives meaning to the way by which it is to be attained and defines the use of the means to be employed. That end, which the Saint never loses sight of and which informs every line he writes, is the soul's attainment to "the Divine light of the perfect union of the love of God, as far as is possible in this life." It is in the light of this end that every word must be understood.¹ Thus the four extant works of St.

¹ The term "end" as applied to God as the Final End of man, or to man's final perfection in the Vision of God, will occur so frequently in these pages that a word may be said about it with the view of avoiding the common misapprehension which arises from its being taken to mean an end, either in the sense of a full stop, or as merely the endless continuance of a static state, in which all is seen at once and so fully that there is no more to be seen, implying a sense of sameness and monotony which is hardly attractive. But the Christian meaning of the term is far different, for as Augustine says, the End "is not that which is consumed so that it be not, but that which is perfected so that it fully be," an End, which though attained and known so that nothing more is or can be desired, yet can never be wholly apprehended or exhausted, of which the more that is known, the more there is to know since the object of knowledge and love is God who is infinite perfection, whilst man the knower and lover, is ever finite, who though he see all cannot grasp all, and though finite has yet

John must be read as one, the describing and mapping of a single, continuous process, each stage of which is related to that which has gone before and to that which follows, all being initiated and continued by God who, as Final End, draws souls to Himself. The failure to recognize this unity has often led readers of *The Ascent* and *The Dark Night* to recoil in dismay, and indeed, with much misunderstanding, from the teaching contained in these first two works, and has gained for St. John the title of Doctor of *Nada* in place of that which is much more fitting, Doctor of Divine Love. It is true that this ought not to be so since the Saint reiterates continually in these works the reason and end for the detachment demanded of the soul in *The Ascent*, and the purpose of the sufferings caused by the purifying and illuminating experiences of the Dark Night of Sense and that of Spirit—which are described in his first volumes. But few read with the care St. John requires, and without this the signposts on the way are obscured by the demands of the way, which would be indeed excessive and inhuman, as they have been called, did they exist for themselves, were ends and not simply means to an end which alone justifies them. And what that end is St. John attempts to tell more fully in *The Spiritual Canticle* and *The Living Flame of Divine Love*. That it is impossible for one who has not had some experience of the high state of union which he there describes to enter into the full meaning of his words may be granted, but no one could fail to see how completely his account of

something of infinity about him which ever awaits and is capable of receiving further satisfaction.

Nor is such a state entirely foreign to or inconceivable by the mind. For the greater a thing is the more its completeness and perfection escapes our full apprehension, so that however well known it may be, we return to it with joy and find new delight in it. So is it of the music of Bach or Beethoven, the art of Michaelangelo or the della Robbia's, the *Divina Commedia* of Dante or the plays of Shakespeare. Precisely because they are the "finished" things they are can we never have enough of them or know all that they are. Even more striking and illustrative is the fact, as in the case of the Greek tragedies, in which the plots were known to the audience, which is, of course, true of Shakespeare's plays to-day, that we enjoy the known more than the unknown. *Othello* or *Macbeth* appeals to, satisfies and reinforces in a much higher degree and more permanently than a detective story in which the end is unknown.

that union affects and illuminates all the teaching of *The Ascent* and *The Dark Night*. For there we are given some intimation not only of the high possibilities of the spiritual life but of the reality and substance of that union of the soul with God in knowledge and love "which passeth all understanding," being, as St. John says, "so interior and spiritual that words commonly fail to describe it, since spirit transcends sense, and it is with difficulty that anything can be said of the substance thereof." Yet let it be clear that that of which the Saint speaks is no more nor can be, than that which is promised in Holy Scripture and summed up in our Lord's words, "If any man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him and We will come unto him and make Our abode with Him." These are words not of rhetoric or poetry but of a divinely accomplished fact, wherein God who is Spirit, unites Himself to the spirit of man His child, so that, in St. Paul's tremendous sentence, he who loves and does the divine will is "filled with all the fulness of God." Of the nature of this union we shall speak later; it is but mentioned here as giving the explanation and justification of what St. John teaches as to the means by which the soul prepares itself with the aid of Divine grace, and is prepared by God for the experience of this union in this life. Only as we see, even if we cannot understand, the end can we discern the necessity of the way which St. John describes, a way which none but lovers will walk, and to whom that which terrifies so many is as nothing compared to the end to which it leads, that union of lover and Beloved for which all things are counted but as loss.

II. The statement, even in so brief a manner, of this end, introduces a second cause for the difficulty we are considering, which, perhaps, is the greatest one for the modern reader. It is the immense gulf which exists between the Christianity of the New Testament and of the Catholic tradition, in which St. John stands, and that widespread, minimized and vulgarized conception of Christianity which is common to our day. There is hardly a single fundamental point upon which that which is popularly conceived

to be the Christian religion agrees whole-heartedly with the basic truths contained in the New Testament and accepted by St. John as the foundation of all his teaching. This statement will, no doubt, be questioned by many, but it is based on a wide knowledge of what professing Christians think, believe and say, as well as upon a large proportion of what is written and preached in our time. The Saint's teaching upon the Being of God ; His supreme sovereignty over His creatures ; their essential relation to Him ; upon human nature and its end ; upon the unique fact of the Incarnation, its implications and significance for man ; upon the imitation and following of Christ ; the essentially supernatural character of truth and grace, and the purpose for which they are bestowed ; the meaning and the primary place in the Christian life of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, together with the Gifts of the Holy Ghost ; upon prayer and contemplation ; the indwelling of the Holy Trinity in the soul ; the true nature, effects of and progress in the Christian life from the earliest to the highest stages, upon each and all of these the modern conception is inadequate and defective even when it is not false. So, like the Jews of old, we are astonished at his teaching, " This is a hard saying, who can hear it ? " and this because, as with them, the spiritual content and meaning of our religion has been buried beneath a mass of merely natural ideas and human interpretations by which the truths of the Gospel have been reduced to the level of a commonplace and poverty-stricken semi-spirituality, if indeed the term may be used at all. We do not stand upon that rock of a full, Scriptural and Catholic tradition as to what and why the Christian religion is, upon which St. John stands ; we stumble and slip in a quicksand of half-understood and weakly held beliefs, theories, guesses and opinions devoid of any intellectual or spiritual basis ; we are the victims of an emotionalism of the senses, the nature and evils of which St. John has much to say, which shrinks from that strong, piercing wind of the Spirit which blows through his writings and would sweep away the sophisms and illusions which

keep us from facing even the ascent of the lower slopes of Mount Carmel.

The existence and reality of these differences will become apparent as we consider the Saint's teaching ; here we but note the barrier they place to any understanding of that teaching. To put it more concisely and exactly, in order to understand St. John, what is first needed is not a knowledge of mysticism but of Christianity, or, even more plainly, to understand St. John we must first understand Jesus Christ and His words, and that in His sense rather than our own. It is useless to read St. John if one is not familiar with, "at home" in, the New Testament, and has at least begun to walk in the way of the following of Christ, which St. John defines as "an habitual desire to imitate Christ in everything that He does, conforming himself to His life, upon which life he must meditate so that he may know how to imitate it, and to behave in all things as Christ would behave" (A. I, xiii, 3). For as à Kempis says : "He who would fully and with relish understand the words of Christ must study to conform his whole life to Him," since "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and are life," and so may only be understood by "the spiritual man" of whom the Apostle speaks in the second chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians. "Holy things to the holy," cried the deacon in the ancient Liturgy of the Church ; it is a truth too easily forgotten.

III. The third cause to be noted is a not uncommon failure to recognize that although much of St. John's instruction concerns all Christians, indeed, all men, his works have a direct purpose which, he repeats again and again, applies to a certain class alone, those "many souls to whom God gives both favour and capacity for making progress," but who "for want of will or knowledge" never get beyond the elementary and preparatory stages of the Christian life. He is writing, as he tells us in the Prologue to *The Ascent*, for such "as aspire to attain to the summit" of Mount Carmel, that is "the perfect union of the love of God, as far as it is possible in this life." He knows that such are com-

paratively few, and speaking of the style of his book he says : " I think that, even were it written in a more excellent and perfect manner than it is, only the minority would profit by it, for we shall not set down here things that are very moral and delectable for all spiritual persons who desire to travel toward God by pleasant and delectable ways,¹ but solid and substantial instruction, as well suited to one kind of person as another *if they desire to pass to the detachment of spirit which is here treated.*" The words I have italicized are significant, as indeed are many of the Saint's phrases which if not carefully noted lead to much misunderstanding; he is mainly concerned not with those who are seeking detachment in the ordinary sense of the word, from possessions or passions, but detachment of the spirit, the innermost centre of the soul, from all that is not God Himself.

But St. John limits the scope of his work even further. " Nor is my principal intent to address all, but rather certain persons of our sacred Order of Mount Carmel of the primitive observance, both friars and nuns—since they have desired me to do so—to whom God is granting the favour of setting them on the road to this Mount ; who, as they are already detached from the temporal things of this world, will better understand the instruction concerning detachment of spirit " (A., Prologue, 9). The Saint frequently reminds his readers of these limitations : " Let us now address the understanding of the spiritual man, and particularly, that of the man to whom God has granted the favour of leading him into the state of contemplation (for, as I have said, I am now speaking to these in particular) " (A. II, vii, 13). " It is necessary that, in each of these books, the reader should bear in mind the purpose of which we are speaking " (A. III, ii, 1). In the Prologue to *The Dark Night*, he says : " Before we enter upon the exposition of these stanzas, it is well to understand here that the soul that utters them is now in the state

¹ Cf. St. Teresa, *Life*, c. xiii, " a disposition to reconcile soul and body together, in order that we may not miss our ease in this world, and yet have the fruition of God in the next ; and so it will be if we walk according to justice, clinging to virtue ; but it is the pace of a hen—it will never bring us to liberty of spirit."

of perfection, which is the union of love with God," and in that to *The Spiritual Canticle*, the commentary upon which was written at the request of Mother Ana de Jesus: "I trust that, although I write here of certain points of scholastic theology concerning the interior commerce of the soul with its God, it may not have been in vain to have talked somewhat after the manner of pure spirit; for though Your Reverence may lack the practise of scholastic theology, wherein are comprehended Divine verities, you lack not that of mystical theology, which is the science of love, and wherein these verities are not only known, but experienced."

To these clear indications that he writes for a limited number of readers there must be added his reiterated statement that those who come to the high state of union by love with God in such a manner that they have a direct experience of God Himself, which is what is meant by the mystic union (which will be dealt with later), are few in number. Commenting on our Lord's words, "For strait is the gate and narrow the way that leadeth unto life and few there be that find it," he says, "the reason of this must be noted, which is that there are few who can enter, and desire to enter, into this complete detachment and emptiness of spirit" (A. II, vii, 3). Whether he is rightly interpreting the import of our Lord's words in restricting them to apply to that union with God in the Spiritual Marriage *in this life*, we need not inquire, the fact is that he is doing so for it is of this, not of the Vision of God in heaven that he writes of, and this, he says, but few attain to. In chap. xxi, 3 of the same book we read: "God condescends to certain souls, and grants them that which is best for them, because they will not or cannot walk by any other road." Again, speaking of the humble in chap. ii, 8 of the First Book of *The Dark Night*, "But souls who in the beginning journey with this degree of perfection are, as I understand, and has been said, a minority," and more appositely in chap. viii, 1, "The night of sense is common and comes to many . . . the night of the spirit is the portion of a very few," and in chap. ix, 9, "not all those who consciously walk in the way of the spirit are brought

by God to contemplation, nor even the half of them—why, He knows best.” Later (chap. xiv, 1) we have “not all, but only the smallest number, pass habitually” into the Night of the Spirit, and in chap. xv of Book II, “This soul had to go forth to perform a deed so heroic and *so rare*,” and in chap. xx, 5, “these souls, who are few.” Turning to *The Spiritual Canticle* we find “it must be known that many souls obtain to the first cellars (of Divine love) and enter therein, each according to the perfection of love which he possesses, but few in this life attain to this last and innermost perfection” of the Spiritual Marriage (stanza xvii, 3); and in stanza i, 20 of *The Living Flame*, “This severe purification comes to pass in few souls—in those alone whom God desires to raise to some degree of union by means of contemplation,” a statement repeated in stanza ii, 11, where one reason is given for this fewness, “Few souls attain to this state, but some have done so, especially those whose virtue and spirituality was to be transmitted to the succession of their children. For God bestows spiritual wealth and strength upon the head of a house according as He means his descendants to inherit the first-fruits of the Spirit.”

It is no less of supreme importance to note that, as the Saint constantly repeats, he is not writing of the final union of the soul with God in heaven, but with that particular kind of union, “*so far as it is possible in this life*,” which is accomplished in the highest stage of the contemplative life, the Spiritual Marriage. Much, not only of common misunderstanding, but of controversy among theologians concerning St. John’s doctrine, has resulted from a forgetfulness or ignoring of this fact which removes his treatises from the ranks of those devoted to consideration of the final end of the Christian life and the means by which it is attained.

We shall have to return to these texts when we come to consider the problem of the relation of the mystic States and contemplation to sanctity; at present we have only cited them as illustrations of the limited audience whom St. John primarily addresses. Primarily, we say, for it must not be thought that he has not valuable and necessary things to say

to all Christians, as we shall see when we study his teaching in detail.

IV. A fourth difficulty arises from the fact that St. John, unlike St. Teresa, writes with the pen of a theologian, one trained in the *philosophia perennis* of the Schools, as an acute psychologist and with both knowledge and experience of the mystic states he describes. Thus he stands in a position and uses a language, precise and technical, both of which are unfamiliar to the average practising Christian of the twentieth century. Some knowledge of that philosophic and theological background, its principles and terms, is then necessary, and it will probably be of most service to the reader if in the following chapters we take the essential foundation principles and truths upon which St. John bases his doctrine one by one, stating the principle or truth, defining its terms, both by reference to the Catholic tradition and to St. John's own words, and then going on to those deductions and implications which the Saint draws out and enforces.

But one essential fact, almost completely ignored by most of St. John's critics and even by his admirers, must be carefully noted here. We have said that he is a theologian, trained in the schools and using their language, that of the Christian philosopher, particularly of St. Thomas Aquinas. But he writes primarily, not from the scholastic but the mystic point of view, so that many of the terms he uses do not bear precisely the same connotation as they would in a purely theological treatise. The theologian, St. Thomas for instance, is concerned with Divine realities from an ontological, metaphysical, speculative point of view, the mystic, St. John, with the same realities from that of the mystic experience born of that infused wisdom communicated by God in contemplation. The Christian philosopher strives to use his terms in an exact and precise sense which his science attaches to them, the mystic, as St. John himself confesses, knows that "it would be ignorance to think that sayings of love understood mystically . . . can be fairly explained by words of any kind," he can only "allow some-

thing of that which (he) feels to overflow and utter secret mysteries from the abundance of the spirit, rather than explain these things rationally " as the strict theologian attempts to do so as far as is possible (S.C., Prologue). Examples of this differing use of terms will be noted as we come to them.

There is, of course, nothing strange in this ; we are familiar with the same fact as it occurs in the various sciences and even in the ordinary things of daily life. Rich, from one point of view as human language is, from another it is so poor and inadequate that the same word has to be used and understood in various shades of meaning dependent upon the particular science or circumstance in which it is employed. Thus the term " life " means one thing to a biologist, another to a physicist, another to a psychologist, still another in such phrases as " seeing life " or " high life," and something very different in our Lord's " I am come that they might have life." This multiplicity of meanings which attaches to so many terms is one of the chief causes of the endless discussions upon almost every subject in which no finality or agreement is possible, unless the disputants first agree upon the meaning they assume the terms used to possess.

In reading St. John, then, this distinction must be borne in mind, as it has been said " the style of the mystic is not that of the scholastic," but neither is it contrary to the latter, but of a different order, in the light of which it must be read and understood.

V. St. John tells us in the Prologue to *The Ascent* that in what he has to say, he will " trust neither to experience nor to knowledge, since both may fail and deceive," but to Holy Scripture, " for if we guide ourselves by this, we shall be unable to stray, since He who speaks therein is the Holy Spirit," and, again, in that to *The Spiritual Canticle*, that he will not rely upon his own experience or that of others, " though I purpose to profit by both, unless it be confirmed and expounded by authorities from the Divine Scripture," and further he announces his intention " not

to depart from the sound sense and doctrine of our holy Mother the Catholic Church." St. John's devotion to Holy Scripture is more than once noted by those who knew him. "He was very fond of reading in the Scriptures," writes Fray Juan Evangelista, "and I never once saw him read any other books than the Bible (almost all of which he knew by heart), St. Augustine, *Contra Haereses*, and the *Flos Sanctorum*," and it is no exaggeration to say that his teaching is not only founded in Holy Scripture but never goes beyond it. But since much of his use of the Bible is of a character which, at least outside the Church, has ceased to be common and is even disapproved by many, it may form a difficulty in reading him which may be dealt with here.

For some centuries past Holy Scripture has been so regarded from a critical, textual and controversial point of view, as mainly a storehouse of moral lessons or even, especially in England, from the point of view of a model of classical literature, that the dictum of St. Thomas Aquinas, "The whole purpose of Holy Scripture is the knitting of man's soul to God, the Holy and Supreme" (*Proemium in Psalterium*), has largely been forgotten. Further, despite the evidence supplied by the authors of the books of the Bible as to there being more than one sense in which the Scriptures are to be understood, many to-day would agree with the statement put in the mouth of an objector by St. Thomas that "No meaning drawn from the words of Scripture other than what the writer meant can be termed its real meaning, for the author of any portion of Scripture could only have had one meaning in mind, since, as the Philosopher says, 'No one can mean several things at once'." St. Thomas replies, that the principal Author of Holy Scripture is the Holy Spirit, Who in any one expression of Scripture meant far more than any expositor can expound or discover. At the same time there is nothing repugnant in the notion that man, who is the instrumental cause of Holy Scripture, should in one expression mean several things. For the Prophets, as St. Jerome says on *Osee*, so spoke of present facts as to intend thereby to signify

future things. Consequently it is not impossible to mean several things at once, when, that is, one is a figure of another ! (*Quodlibet*, vii, 14, ad 5m). The constant tradition of the Church asserts that there are four possible interpretations of the words of Holy Scripture, the historical or literal, the allegorical, the moral and the spiritual. St. Thomas is emphatic that the literal sense comes first and that the rest are based on it, "on the literal sense alone can we base arguments . . . nothing necessary to faith is given under the spiritual sense without its being manifestly stated elsewhere under the literal sense" (*S.T.* I, I, x, R1). With Chrysostom, Jerome and Augustine he has no sympathy with the far-fetched "spiritual" interpretations of the Alexandrians, equally with them he knows the truth and value of a spiritual and mystical interpretation which does not deny or destroy the literal sense which, for him, is the sole foundation of dogmatic truth. "The authority of Scripture is sufficient," he often remarks, and "faith holds to all the articles of the Faith because of one principle, that is, the primal truth set before us in the Scriptures according to the teaching of the Church which has sound understanding of them."

Now St. John is writing upon the spiritual and mystical life, so that whilst he adheres to the principles of the interpretation of Scripture laid down by St. Thomas, he makes most use of the spiritual sense of the words of the Bible, and this in the most illuminating manner, hardly ever, if at all, falling into extravagances not unknown to some writers. In chap. xix of the Second Book of *The Ascent* in which he deals with the question that "although visions and locutions which come from God are true, we may be deceived about them," he says that this is so for two reasons, one "the defective way in which we understand them ; and the other, the variety of their causes." He goes on to illustrate from Holy Scripture how that many prophecies and words of God were not fulfilled as was commonly expected because men "understood them after their own manner . . . very literally," whereas "the principal intention of God in giving

these things is to express and convey the spirit which is in them . . . (which) is much more pregnant in meaning than the letter, and is very extraordinary, and goes far beyond its limits." Amongst other examples he notes the outstanding one concerning the prophecies relating to our Lord, many of which, and these to which the Jews were most attached, not being fulfilled in a literal sense, the fact being "that these prophecies had to be understood, concerning Christ, spiritually, in which sense they were entirely true."

VI. Our list of possible difficulties which may present themselves to one or another of St. John's readers would not be complete were something not said about what he means by mysticism and the mystic state. This is the more necessary since many modern writers upon the subject use these terms often in an entirely ambiguous fashion and not infrequently in a sense which was certainly not that of our Saint, nor indeed of any of the great Christian mystics. Some examples will make this clear. Some modern Christian writers make the mystical life to be no more than, as Dom S. Louismet says, "the normal Christian life, the full Christian life, which is not lived, alas! by the immense majority of people," and there is a sense in which this is true, just as it is true, in a sense, that every Christian in a state of grace is in a mystic, that is, definitely real relation to God, or as it is true in a sense that all prayer which is directed toward will-union with God is mystical in essence. But this is not the sense, as will be seen, in which St. John and the great mystics use the term. Nor do they mean, as Dr. Kirk says in *The Vision of God*, that "wherever a man's mind has been uplifted, his temptation thwarted, his sorrows comforted, his resolutions strengthened, his aberrations controlled, by the sight of purity, innocence, love or beauty—indeed, wherever he has, even for a moment, recognized and responded to the distinction between good and evil, better and worse,—such a man has had in part the mystical experience. Dim though his mirror may have been, he has yet seen God. . . . So far, then, from being rare, the mystical experience is at once the commonest and the greatest of human accidents"

(p. 464, second edition, 1932). Now, St. John himself would have been the last to deny that God is to be seen in all the ways Dr. Kirk enumerates ; his own words frequently enlarge upon the fact. But none of this is what he states as the mystical experience, which, indeed, a large part of his *Ascent* is given to show, can only result from an entire detachment of the interior as well as exterior senses from all ideas or experiences derived from creatures perceivable by the senses or conceived in the mind, imagination or memory. To him, as to all the great mystics, the mystic experience is of God Himself in as direct and intimately personal a manner as is possible in this life ; it is precisely not a seeing or experience of God in or through creatures of any kind whatever.

To come to non-Christian writers like Mr. J. W. N. Sullivan, C. E. M. Joad and Middleton Murry, we find a constant confusion between what is known as "nature-mysticism," modern Pantheism and Christian mysticism. To them it seems to mean a feeling of oneness with the universe as a whole, a sense of the illusive character of life, an experience of being emancipated from the temporal and material in the manner in which such a freedom from space and time comes when listening to a Beethoven symphony or rapt before a beautiful view. But, again, all this, whatever truth or fact there may be in it, has no relation to the mystic experience which is of the Personal God Himself, whose existence is commonly denied by the modern pseudo-mystic. We may also note that no Christian mystic would dream of supporting M. Bergson's argument in *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, that his experience supplies the greatest proof of the existence of God. Doubtless it adds to the accumulation of evidence which converges from all sides, since the mystic experience is rooted in and proceeds from such a belief. But, as we see so clearly in St. John, the Christian mystics would be the last to support the popular theory of our time, that the experience of the Christian is the supreme proof of the existence of God. Much more wisely has the Christian tradition ever refused

to base any dogma on the experience of individuals or upon private revelations made to them, rightly preferring the way of reason and faith as giving the only sure foundations upon which religion, dogma and practice, can safely stand.

Here then, are the chief difficulties to be encountered in reading St. John, nor need we be careful to deny that even when they are surmounted, a certain obscurity still remains. The Saint himself admits it and gives the ineluctable reason. "Since this instruction relates to the dark night through which the soul must go to God, let not the reader marvel if it seem to him somewhat dark also" (*A.*, Prologue, 8). "It would be ignorance to think that sayings of love, understood mystically, such as are those of the present stanzas, can be fairly explained by words of any kind. . . . For who can write down that which (God) reveals to loving souls wherein He dwells? And who can set forth in words that which He makes them feel? And lastly, who can express that which He makes them desire? Of a surety, none; nay, indeed, not the very souls through whom He passes" (*S.C.*, Prologue, 1). So, he goes on, only by means of figures, comparisons and similitudes can they let what they experience overflow, in terms which, "if they be not read with the simplicity of the spirit of love and understanding embodied in them, appear to be nonsense rather than the expression of reason," as we find in some books of Holy Scripture.

Every one has experienced a similar difficulty in, for instance, expressing some great emotion, some sight seen or sound heard, the endeavour and the failure to put into words that so real and deep impression which escapes every attempt to clothe it in so poor a manner. It is, indeed, a very rare gift, as may be well inferred from the scarcity of writers who possess it, those who like Conrad, for instance, can so weave words as to make the reader sense the peculiar magic of "the region of shallow waters and forest-clad islands that lies far east, and still mysterious between the deep waters of two oceans." Yet only one who has shared Conrad's experience to some degree will be able to savour his word-painting to the full. The difficulty imposed, partly

by the nature of the things themselves, partly by the poverty of language, is by no means confined to the mystics, no one feels it more than the physical scientist of to-day who is driven at last to invent a new symbolism to express the mysteries which confront him. The fact is that the more real knowledge becomes, the more it is rather wisdom than knowledge, and the wisdom which is rather given than attained, the more it becomes incommunicable, since it escapes those ideas and concepts which reason forms and by which our knowledge can be communicated. There are those who can, to more or less extent, guide others toward and amidst the facts of this Divine wisdom and love, as there are those who can guide us to the understanding of great music or art, but who is unaware that when we have listened to all that they have to tell us about the symphonies of Beethoven and Mozart, or of the art of the great Italian painters, there is still something which they have not and cannot tell us, an inner content, ineffable and indescribable, which may be felt but cannot be enclosed in any words, symbols or forms known to us. We need not, then, be surprised, much less contemptuous of this obscurity, after the manner of those critics who assume that Christian mysticism can be understood apart from the Faith in which it is founded.

As to the use St. John makes, in common with the authors of Holy Scripture, of similitudes and metaphors, many of which may seem to be less fitting for their subject than others more exalted might be, the reason given for this by St. Thomas may be recalled. Following Dionysius he gives three reasons why it is more fitting "that Divine truths should be expounded under the figure of less noble than of nobler things, first, because in this way it is less possible to take the descriptions given as literally true in themselves, as might be the case were Divine truths expressed under the figures of nobler created things," a reason which, if it had been known, would have saved many from taking, for instance, the descriptions in the Apocalypse literally and thus causing scandal to numbers of people. Second,

this way of communicating Divine truth is more befitting the knowledge of God so far as it is possible in this life, wherein what He is *not* is clearer to us than what He is. "Therefore similitudes drawn from things farthest away from God form within us a truer estimate that He is infinitely above whatever we may think or say of Him." Third, because thereby Divine truths are the better hidden from the unworthy. He also says that in this way the mind does not rest in the metaphor or similitude, but is raised to the truths which they shadow forth but cannot contain in fulness. (S.T. I, 1, ix).

The reader need hardly be reminded that this method of conveying the highest spiritual truths has the authority of our Lord Himself, that it was, indeed, His most characteristic way of teaching, in which the commonest things of daily life became the medium of the most sublime truths. And this was so, not only because He spoke to simple people in a language and by things they could readily understand, but because it is the Divine way which provides for everything according to its nature, and since even such mystical truths as St. John speaks of are addressed to men who have no other means of knowledge than that which comes through the senses, they must be wrapt up, as it were, in the sensible if they are to be communicated at all. For only by God Himself can such knowledge be communicated directly to the soul, without the intervention of sensible images and ideas, and such knowledge in itself is, as we have said, incommunicable, except under such images, to others.

It must be admitted, finally, that some of the difficulty met with in St. John's writings comes from his style and from a certain ambiguity in the use of some of his terms and descriptions, as, for instance, in his account of the Nights through which the soul must pass, of the early stages of contemplation and of the relation between the Active and Passive sides of the Nights. Such difficulties will be dealt with as we come to them.

The necessary emphasis we have laid, following the Saint's example, upon the facts that he is writing primarily

for a somewhat limited circle, and of a particular state to be attained in this life, must not be taken to imply that he has no teaching for the "ordinary" Christian. On the contrary, as will be seen, he insists upon those very fundamental truths which, much reduced and relegated to the background as they are to-day, are essential to all Christian life and practice. Such are the truths of the transcendence and "otherness" of God, in which alone can His immanence in all things be rightly understood and the errors of Pantheism, common in varying forms in modern times, be avoided; that of His supreme sovereignty over His creatures, as against the individualism and the repetition of the primal sin, which is the assertion of man's independence of God; that of what human nature is and the reason of man's existence, almost completely ignored in all the modern plans for the reconstruction of human life; the place of the intellect as the highest faculty of man's nature, together with the insistence upon the distinction between its supreme function, that of intuition, and reason which is a mark of its present limitation and defectiveness; the innate goodness of human nature in itself, coupled with its inherent incapacity to attain to its highest good; the essentially supernatural character of truth and grace and of the purpose for which both are given; the need and place of a sane, Christian asceticism, the purpose of which is not the inhibiting or destruction of any part of human nature but the harmonizing and perfecting of it; the high place which the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, together with the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, hold in the formation and development of the spiritual life; the relation to these of all the things and practices of religion, which are not meant to satisfy but to increase these virtues within the soul; the necessity of the imitation of Christ, of prayer and meditation, and of progress in prayer toward contemplation; all this is taught with a lucidity and emphasis which can hardly fail to affect any serious Christian man or woman.

Nor must the way in which so much of St. John's

teaching meets what are commonly thought of as peculiarly "modern" questions and needs be overlooked. His doctrine of the Being of God and His relation to creation and man reasserts in firm tones that Christian belief which is contrary to such modern "ideas" of God as are presented by such writers as W. James, Alexander, Whitehead, Murry and Wells ; he has, it might be said, anticipated the Barthian reaction without falling into its extremes. He is more truly "humanist" than the modern humanists since he takes more account of the whole of human nature ; a more competent psychologist than the modern psycho-analyst, steeped in the Freudian or Behaviourist atmosphere ; and by his knowledge of the highest capacities of the mind, no less than those of the emotions, avoids the Bergsonian error of making intuition a property of instinct, instead of the highest exercise of the intellect which is not that of reasoning. His teaching, too, about our Lord, especially in the twenty-second chapter of the Second Book of *The Ascent*, will be found valuable as an antidote to that of many modern cults which denies His supreme and unique place as the All-Sufficient Word of God ; whilst what he says about visions and revelations, true or false, is as opportune to-day as when he wrote. No less opportune and necessary is his emphasis upon the spiritual character and end of the Christian religion in days when it is so regarded as little more than a morality or ethic, the end of which is to establish a Utopia upon earth which, Christian in name, bears more resemblance to the dreams of Mr. H. G. Wells than to the *Civitas Dei* of Christian tradition from the New Testament downwards.

WE have said that to understand St. John of the Cross we must first understand Christianity as it appears in the New Testament and in the unbroken tradition conserved and taught by the great theologians and masters of the spiritual life. And since we live in an age in which this Christianity has been largely forgotten, and when, too, the term is used to cover ideas and systems which depart from or are contrary to it, as is the case not only with many popular religious cults of the moment but in the writings of those who, like the late Professor Huxley in his *Philosophy of a Biologist* and Professor John Macmurray in his writings, whilst denying the essential Christian truths yet attach the term to that very denial, it seems to be necessary to begin our study of St. John's doctrine with a brief résumé of what Holy Scripture and the Catholic tradition have always defined Christianity and the Christian life to be. For St. John lives in and upon this tradition, assumes it throughout all his writings, constantly refers to it in passing as something known and believed, just as do the New Testament writers themselves. In both cases the writers have a special purpose in view, that is, to recall and emphasize, under some immediate necessity, some truth or aspect of the Faith which they accept as a whole but parts of which they but barely refer to, since these do not concern their immediate purpose. So St. John, who is not writing a formal treatise on the whole of Christianity, nor on the Christian life in general, but upon that life viewed from its highest possible achievement in this world, writing too, primarily for religious who are grounded in the Faith, relies upon the reader to fill in the *lacunæ* from the knowledge he possesses of the essential truths upon which all Christian life and practice are founded. We need not concern ourselves with the historical foundation and dogmatic expressions upon and in which the facts of Christianity as a whole are established, but only with what,

from the beginning, the Christian life has been conceived to be in itself, its end, and the means by which it is communicated to men, is lived by them and arrives at its end.

The Christian life in itself as distinct from its manifestation in practice, with which it is often confounded, as if *doing* was *being* instead of the consequence of being, is the gift of God through Jesus Christ, as teaches our Lord Himself, St. Paul, St. Peter and St. John. Redeemed from sin by the Sacrifice of Calvary, we are "saved by grace through faith; and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God" (Eph. ii, 8). "For if, when we were enemies we were reconciled unto God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Rom. v, 10). "After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we had done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost: which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by His grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus iii, 4-7), the which, our Lord says, consists in the knowledge of God, "This is eternal life, that they might know Thee, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John xvii, 3). At the outset, then, the Christian life is seen to be a supernatural gift to which man possesses no title, save that of his misery, which he can do nothing to merit, but can only receive from God through the channel He ordains as he receives his natural life in a similar way. He is born after the flesh but is more than flesh by the possession of a spiritual nature, a soul created by God which united to his body, is the living principle and "form" of the whole of his activity as a human being. But being a member of that race which lost its first estate in Adam's fall and by that loss is incapable of attaining his true end, that being a supernatural one beyond the reach of his natural powers, man needs to be born again by water and the Spirit, as our Lord declares, a new birth after a heavenly and spiritual manner, "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of

incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever " (1 Peter i, 23), by " the washing of regeneration " in Baptism wherein, as St. Peter declares, as in the " ark, eight souls were saved by water, the like figure whereunto baptism doth also now save us " (*ibid.* iii, 20-21).

By the fall that good thing of our human nature which God " created to be immortal, and made him to be an image of His own eternity " (Wisdom ii, 23), was not irretrievably destroyed, but it was rendered incapable of attaining to that union with God for which it had been created, its natural faculties of reason and will deprived of grace, being so weakened that they tended towards lesser goods, mistaking the creature for the Creator and seeking in the things of time that satisfaction and perfection which lay in God alone. It was to redeem and save that nature that the Eternal Word took it to Himself at the Incarnation, and by His Passion and Resurrection won for man the return of his lost inheritance which He bestows upon those who believe in Him through His mystical Body the Church, in the teaching and sacraments of which the " truth and grace " He brought to earth are distributed to the souls of men. What, then, is this " truth and grace," and what are its effects upon our human nature ?

So much attention has been paid to the subject of grace that both in theological circles and popular estimation it has come to occupy a more prominent place than that of the truth which the Beloved Apostle couples with it in the prologue to his Gospel. Two reasons compel us to consider it in this chapter, the first being that it has a much larger place in the New Testament and in the Christian life than is commonly recognized, the second that so much of St. John's exposition is concerned with it.

The truth which our Lord brought to earth in His Person and teaching is primarily the truth about God the adorable Trinity, God " who is the Trinity " as Augustine says. It is also the truth about man, his nature, state and end, his relation to God, his dependence upon Him, the means by which he can come to know, love and serve Him and so

attain his end. Further, it is the truth about man's relation to his neighbour and to the world about him, it is, in fact, the whole of that truth which it is necessary man should know and believe in order to fulfil the end of his creation, that is, it is wholly concerned with that eternal life which is the knowledge and possession of God, begun here that it may be perfected hereafter. Thus although our Lord possessed all possible knowledge and wisdom, as St. Paul says, yet He did not come to convey all, since "ordinarily God neither works nor reveals anything that can be accomplished by human counsel and industry" (A. II, xxii, 13).

That which most directly concerns us is the truth about God Himself, and especially the insistence of the New Testament upon the necessity of that knowledge of God which is eternal life. Not that this is a new truth, the Old Testament is full of it, as are also the philosophers of the ancient world. "The position of God in the philosophy of Plato and Socrates," writes Professor A. E. Taylor, "seems ambiguous, and not fully thought out." Yet he notes that Plato's "Form of Good," whilst not another name for God, is identical with the Christian philosopher's conception of God, and the Platonic search for "the very being with which true knowledge is concerned; the colourless, formless, intangible essence visible only to mind, the pilot of the soul," in which the true philosopher "clings to the recollection of those things in which God abides, and in beholding which, He is what He is," has strongly influenced Christian thought in every age. And this especially because Plato's knowledge of God, even more than that of Aristotle, is akin to that "loving knowledge" of which St. John continuously speaks, and of the ascent to which Plato uses words which the Saint almost parallels in the early chapters of the *Spiritual Canticle*. "The true order of going, or being led by another, to the things of love, is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upwards for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms; from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he

arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is" (*Symposium*, 210D-212A, Jowett's translation). Thus "in that communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the mind," he becomes "the friend of God, and immortal, if mortal man may."

With Aristotle we come to more precision as to the existence and being of God, and to the identification of knowledge with life. In the twelfth book of his *Metaphysics*, having shown that God is intelligence, he concludes that His life is the most perfect and eternal, because His intellect is the most perfect and always in act. "The Life of God is His intellect, as before laid down. In God, the Intellect, the thing understood, and the act of understanding, are one and the same. Hence, whatever is in God as understood, is the living of God itself, or, in other words, His Life. Since all things that have been made by God exist in Him as things understood, it follows that all things in Him are the Divine Life itself" (*S.T.* I, XVIII, iv; cf. *Contra Gentiles*, IV, xi).

Now it is the fact that man is an intelligent, rational creature which constitutes him the most perfect image of God upon earth and establishes in him a natural affinity to God, *capax Dei*, capable of knowing and possessing God, for knowledge is a possession, in fact the most perfect mode of possession. Aristotle himself had glimpsed this; the ideal of the philosopher is "the worship and contemplation of God," for contemplation is the one "Divine" activity which most renders a man acceptable to the gods. Thus it is by that in which he is most like to God that man is most capable of coming to God and participating in His Life, "to see Him as He is," with the eye of the mind illumined by the Light of Glory is the final perfecting of that same, as yet imperfect seeing of the mind aided by faith which is possible in this life. But before we glance at the degrees of the knowledge of God accessible to man, let us turn to the emphasis laid upon the necessity of that knowledge in the Old Testament. From the large number of relevant passages, note the repeated "Ye shall know that I am the

Lord " from Exodus onwards ; the frequent prayer for such knowledge, " Show me now Thy way, that I may know Thee " (Ex. xxiii, 13), " That all people of the earth may know Thy Name, and fear Thee " (2 Chron. vi, 33 : Vulg. 4, Kings)—Name, be it remembered stands for being, person ; Solomon's prayer for wisdom, which is the highest knowledge of God and Divine things, and of the Psalmist, " O give me understanding, and I shall keep Thy law " ; the reproach of God, " Israel doth not know ; My people doth not consider " (Is. i, 3) ; " My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge, because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will reject thee " (Hos. iv, 6) for " there is no knowledge of God in the land " (*ibid.* iv, 1), that knowledge He desires " more than burnt-offerings " (*ibid.* vi, 6) ; the promise that in the new dispensation " the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea " (Is. xi, 9) ; all of which becomes more definite in the book of Wisdom, " to know Thee is perfect righteousness ; yea, to know Thy power is the root of immortality " (xv, 3) for wisdom is " a teacher of the mysteries of the knowledge of God " (viii, 4) by which men are saved (*ibid.* ix, 18) and which " they that use become the friends of God " (*ibid.* vii, 14). The whole of chaps. vi-x inclusive should be studied in this connexion, together with Ecclesiasticus i and iv. In the New Testament we have already noted our Lord's declaration that the knowledge of God is eternal life, and this finds many echoes in the Epistles. " The Son of God hath come and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life " (1 John v, 20). " Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ " (2 Pet. iii, 18). God, says St. Paul, " will have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth " (1 Tim. ii, 4), prays that his Colossian converts may " increase in the knowledge of God " (Coll. i, 10) and that " the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give " unto those of Ephesus, " the spirit of

wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Eph. i, 17). And in the first two chapters of the first Epistle to the Corinthians we have the assertion of the supremacy of that Divine wisdom which is of God and of the truth that the Christian has received "not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things which are freely given to us of God. Which things we also speak not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual," words which might fitly stand at the head of the works of St. John of the Cross. What knowledge of God, then, is possible to man in this life, and what are the characteristics and distinctive qualities of that knowledge?

I. There is the knowledge which man is capable of gaining by the exercise of his natural faculties, intellectual and sensible, turned upon both the things of the visible universe without and the nature, capacities and desires of his own being, that knowledge of which St. Paul speaks in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, which Plato and Aristotle arrived at, St. Thomas synthesized in the first treatises of his *Summa Theologica* and *Contra Gentiles*, and which St. John of the Cross dwells upon in stanzas iv and v of *The Spiritual Canticle*. It is acquired by the activity of the mind passing from and through the visible to the invisible, the particular to the universal, the matter to the "form," the Divine idea which makes each thing to be what it is, from the finite to the infinite, the temporal to the eternal, from dependent beings to Being in itself, from effects to their Primal Cause. Such knowledge ranges in degree from that of the simple peasant, *le charbonnier*, discerning vaguely but implicitly the existence of the Creator and something of what He must be, to that of the philosopher who, although his science cannot attain to the Divine essence in itself, yet truly knows God through the perfections of created things, perceiving, as the writer of *Wisdom* says, "how much better the Lord of them is . . . for by the greatness and beauty of the creatures proportionably the Maker of them is known" (xiii, 1-5).

II. A further, more definite, certain and more embracing knowledge of God is that to which the gift of faith enables the human intellect to attain. "Faith," says St. Thomas, "perfects reason," extends its natural vision to that which of itself it is incapable of, in something of the way that a telescope enables the eye to see what lies beyond its natural capacity, "withdraws the mind from the realm of sense and sets it on the foundation of intelligible things . . . draws Divine things towards us," in the sense that when we look through a telescope the stars appear to be so much nearer to us although actually it is our vision which alone is affected, causes "Divine things to abide in us" since by giving us a new knowledge it confers a new possession of Divine things. The Apostle St. John tells us that we shall see God "as He is" (1 John iii, 2), and St. Paul that "now we see through a mirror" a metal, not a glass one, in which the reflection would not be clear and distinct, "in an obscure manner" or enigmatically, *per speculum in ænigmatie*, "but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known" (1 Cor. xiii, 12), that is we shall see and know God as He sees and knows us, by an immediate vision, knowing Him as He is in His essential Being. Here in this life we know only in part, but the knowledge of faith is a true knowledge of God though it is not one of sight in the sense that it will be in heaven. St. John calls faith "formless knowledge," "outlined in the soul . . . for even as the outline is not a perfect picture, so the knowledge of faith is not perfect knowledge." Yet "faith gives and communicates to us God Himself, but covered with the silver veil of faith; but it fails not for that reason to give Him to us in truth" (S.C., stanza xi). More will be said of this when we consider St. John's teaching upon faith more fully.

III. Beyond the knowledge of God attainable by the exercise of reason and the gift of faith, there is yet a more profound knowledge, that which is given by God Himself in the mystic experience, of which so much will be said later, since St. John is the authority *par excellence* upon this

"loving knowledge," that it must be but mentioned here. Suffice to say that it is faith perfected in its operation by the gifts of the Spirit, especially those of Understanding and Wisdom which "cometh from on high," and of which St. Thomas says that it gives a certain co-naturality or affinity with the Divine, so that there is an immediate experience of the presence of God in the apex or "fine point of the spirit," to use St. François de Sales' phrase, in which God Himself is touched and tasted with the spiritual senses in that union of love which constitutes the summit of Mount Carmel, the Spiritual Marriage of the Divine Bridegroom and His human bride.

It is in this final end, so far as this life is concerned, that we are enabled to see the real character of all that knowledge of God of which we have been speaking, a knowledge never merely intellectual but ever leading to and ever more infused with love for Him who is known. Again, this is a point which will come up later, when both St. Thomas and St. John will be our guides toward understanding the relation between knowledge and love, and the seeing of how sometimes the one, sometimes the other most powerfully leads the soul to its end, the Vision of and the possession of God in heaven. That which we would emphasize in this section is the possibility of a much greater knowledge of God accessible to man in this life than even most Christians imagine to be the case, and that a great deal of the mediocrity of our love and service of God is due to our neglect of the seeking of that knowledge. For "only that which is known can be loved" as Aquinas teaches, and the answer of the Penny Catechism to the question, "Why did God make you?" is too often read with a virtual omission of the first words "God made me *to know*, love and serve Him." Too many rest content with the knowledge of information conveyed by another instead of going on to that knowledge which is the truth made our own, so becoming our very life and the fructifying seed of that eternal life which planted here below in our souls comes to its full perfection in heaven above. For "that which is known is in the knower after

his manner of knowing " and man's manner of knowing is a spiritual one (the term "spiritual" as used here is not synonymous with religious), the immaterial intellect grasping and receiving the thing perceived itself, not merely the idea of it, taking the term idea here as indicating a concept of the mind. To know God is to possess God who is Life, and it is a primary object of all created things, but especially of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ to give us this knowledge. Whenever this is forgotten religion tends to become little more than a series of emotions or a morality deprived of that which supports and justifies it, whilst theology, the science of the things of God, "an impression of the Divine knowledge itself," as says St. Thomas, is regarded as useless word-spinning, a "letter" hindering and killing the spirit of religion. A balanced and growing faith and practice requires both St. Paul and St. John the Evangelist, St. Augustine and St. Thomas, St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross.

Passing to the subject of grace we must first note that we are dealing, not with a vague abstraction, but with a Divine reality. The statement is not unnecessary since the term "spiritual" so often but conveys the sense of "unreal" in the minds of those who in thought confine the term "real" to that which is cognizable by the senses, whereas that which has most title to the term lies beyond sensible perception. Things are real in so far as they have being, and the more being they possess, that is, the nearer they approach to God who is Being *per se*, the more real are they. Thus it is not the things of the sensible, material order, but those of the spiritual, immaterial order which are most real, mind more real than matter, soul than body, angel than man, since the latter is a composite of spiritual and material whilst the former is pure spirit, and God the supreme, self-subsistent Real Being without any composition, limitation or potentiality.

Grace, then, is a reality caused in the soul by the action of God by which, as St. Peter says, we are made "partakers of the Divine nature." "Nature" here stands for "life," "activity," not essence or being (2 Pet. i, 4), and the

activity of God upon creatures consists, as says St. Albert the Great, in causing them to receive something of the Divine goodness according to their nature and capacity, by which bestowal they are enabled to participate in and so reproduce some degree of that goodness itself. Now all creatures find their end and perfection in God toward whom, each after their own manner, they tend as to the Universal and Final Cause of their being. But man is capable of so doing in a manner uniquely his own arising from the fact that he is a rational and willing being, although this capacity is purely one of reception, since both by the condition of his nature in itself and by the fact of sin he has no active power by which he can obtain the Divine life which is necessary to his perfection. To that perfection he is called, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect," yet by himself this is literally impossible, man can no more perfect himself than he can create himself. But although the power of perfecting himself does not lie within his nature, yet that nature is capable of receiving it, and this power which is of God, we call grace, which is the instrument and means of our achievement and fulfilment, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

"Grace constitutes a singular mode of God's existence in the soul," a perfection added to the substance "of the rational creature" (*S.T.* I, viii, 3), "a special manner by which man is with God and in God," says St. Albert, "a created reality," which, uniting us to God, rescues us from our vanity and incapacity, and establishes us in a new relation to Him, that of children who possess something of the eternal life which our Father is. It is not just an "accident," a veneer on the surface of our nature, or a cloke covering yet not healing our wounds or enriching our poverty but the perfection of our nature, an interior transformation of the substance of the soul, an elevation of our nature from the natural to the supernatural order, that of which the Apostle writes: "God who is rich in mercy, for His great love where-with He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us (caused us to live) together with Christ, by

grace ye are saved ; and hath raised us up and made us to sit within the heavenly in Christ Jesus " (Eph. ii, 4-6) and St. John, " Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God . . . beloved, now are we the sons of God " (1 John iii, 1, 2) ; " born again," says St. Peter, " not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever " (1 Pet. 1, 23).

The principal object for which sanctifying grace is given to man is that he may attain to the Vision of God in heaven. All the other effects which it produces in the soul, and the virtues and gifts which accompany it, are all for this end. The gift of grace, then, is the seed of glory, the beginning of our eternal life, the term eternal not being taken to mean merely " unending," but the designation of the Life which is, outside and independent of time and space, a new, Divine quality of life communicated to us. It is this end, the seeing of God in a " face to face " manner without the intervention of any creature, notion or idea, about which the whole of the Christian religion is concerned, and with which, indeed, the best minds not only of the Jewish but of the pagan world were occupied. To seek God's face, to appear before Him, " to behold the fair beauty of the Lord," " to awake up after His likeness and to be satisfied with it," to believe, with Job, " that my redeemer liveth . . . and though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God : whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another," all this Old Testament faith and desire puts to shame much of that modern, debased Christianity which reduces it to a *bourgeois* morality, treats it as an accessory to present happiness and even to success in business and national prosperity. We have seen, too, how deeply the mind of the pagan philosophers was steeped in the same belief and desire, many more examples of which might be given. And when we turn to the New Testament it is almost on the first page that we read " Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God " (Matt. v, 8). This primary and essential Christian fact must be kept in view if we are to grasp the full dignity,

reality and purpose of the Christian life, as well as understand the striking expressions which not only the mystics, but the Fathers and theologians apply to it, nay, those which we find our Lord and His Apostles using. It is the latter, indeed, who speak of the coming of God, the Trinity, to dwell within the soul and thus justify all that the doctors and theologians of the Church have taught upon this subject.

"If any man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him" (John xiv, 22). "I will pray the Father and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him, for He dwelleth with you and shall be in you" (*ibid.* 16-17). "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. iii, 16). "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them" (2 Cor. vi, 16). "If we love one another God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in Him and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit" (1 John iv, 12-13).

Thus it is no theological fancy which prompts the Fathers to speak of the deifying of the soul by grace, and St. Thomas to say that "The whole Trinity dwells in the mind by sanctifying grace, according to the words, We will come unto him and make our abode with him," and "The soul is made like to God by grace" (*S.T.* I, XLIII, v) and in the third article of the same question, "The Divine Person is fittingly sent in the sense that He exists after a new manner in anyone; and He is given as possessed by anyone; and neither of these is otherwise than by sanctifying grace . . . (which) disposes the soul to possess the Divine Person; and this is signified when it is said that the Holy Ghost is given according to the gift of grace."

All the exercise of the Christian life devolves from this new and intimate presence of God in the soul which, far from infringing upon our liberty of choice, often but

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erroneously called free-will, for the proper term is *libero arbitrio*, aids it to the fulfilment of its highest purpose by rescuing the will from the passions of the lower nature and conferring upon it "the glorious liberty of the children of God." For our freedom is not extended but diminished when we take it to mean freedom to choose and do as we like, true freedom grows by our acceptance of all the laws which govern our nature, and the greatest freedom does not lie in the fact that we can transgress these laws, whether of the natural or supernatural order, but that we can obey and use them. "The greatest freedom," says St. Augustine, "consists in the inability to sin." "Perfect freedom," teaches St. Thomas, "consists in the spontaneous and joyous expression of a perfect nature," and such freedom belongs to God alone. Human nature has lost its perfection but it is perfectible, and grace is the perfecting agent, which, however, can and does only do its work as we accept and co-operate with it. And this co-operation consists of a growing surrender of ourselves to the Divine operation within us, as will become evident as we study St. John.

With the gift of sanctifying grace conferred upon the soul in Baptism, come the infused theological virtues, so-called because they direct the soul toward God Himself, of faith, hope and charity, and the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. Grace, as we have said, confers a new nature, "the new creation" of which St. Paul speaks, and the virtues are operative habits which perfect the natural faculties both by directing them toward God and by enabling them to do what they are incapable of by themselves, as we have seen faith does for the intellect. It must be noted, for there is much wrong thinking about this, that the infused virtues do not make things easier for us in the same way or degree that an acquired virtue does. An acquired natural virtue is the consequence of repeated acts by which the will gains a facility to operate habitually in a certain manner. But the infused virtues, not being the consequence of reiterated acts, but being gifts, are not designed to make easier what we could have done without them even if with great difficulty,

but to enable us to do what is impossible to our natural faculties by themselves. A somewhat crude illustration may help us to understand this. One cart-horse can, we will suppose, draw a heavy load along a level road but is totally unable to do so up a steep hill. The carter yokes another horse to the wagon and now the hill is surmounted. The point to notice is that the addition of the second horse does not make the task easier for the first, it must still pull its weight, but the second horse makes an impossible task a possibility. Or again, the natural vision of the eye is the same in itself whether we are in the light or in the dark. The coming of the light does not add to the visual faculty but enables what has been hidden by the darkness to be seen. We are reminded at once of the frequent way in which, both in Holy Scripture and spiritual writers, both grace and the virtues are spoken of under the simile of light, for the first is a participation in the life of God who is light, "and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John i, 5), "who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet. ii, 9), "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. iv, 6). Faith, too, is both a revelation of things to be seen and the light in which they are seen, as it is said of Moses that "by faith . . . he endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. xi, 27), whilst hope and charity are both enlightening virtues, for the former confidently looks for what is not yet possessed and the latter unites to God "whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though you see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. i, 8).

Of these virtues St. John says that they cannot be wrought by the soul alone, nor can she attain to them alone, without the help of God, neither does God work them alone in the soul without her co-operation; for although it is true that every good gift and every perfect gift cometh from above, descending from the Father of Lights, as St. James says (i, 17), "yet no such thing as this is received

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apart from the capacity and without the co-operation of the soul that receives it " (S.C. xxi, 5).

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are supplementary to the virtues, being habitual dispositions or instincts implanted in the soul by God which make us more apt to receive and act upon the Divine inspiration, enabling us to do Divine things in a Divine way and so to produce those "fruits of the Spirit" of which St. Paul speaks (Gal. v, 22: Eph. v, 9-10). They differ from the virtues in that they are moved to operate by God Himself. By the four gifts of Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge and Counsel, God illumines the intellect; Counsel being directed toward a right seeing and acting with regard to particular things, cases, difficulties and problems; Knowledge toward a right appreciation of created things; Understanding toward a similar appreciation and adhesion to the revealed truths of the faith; Wisdom toward a "tasting" of Divine things by the possession which it gives of an affinity with and longing desire for them. The gift of Fortitude perfects the activity of the will; those of Piety and Fear order and strengthen the emotions in respect of both our relation to God and our neighbour. So much will necessarily have to be said later about both the virtues and gifts that to dwell further upon them here would only mean repetition which may well be avoided.

In concluding this chapter it must be emphasized that we have been considering, not Christian "living" but the Christian life in itself, the source and principle of all Christian activity and practice, that life "in Christ" by which we "grow up into Him in all things" (Eph. iv, 15); that by which we may truly say with the Apostle, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. ii, 20). The factual nature of the Christian life as defined and described in the New Testament has been so forgotten, being overlaid by the modern conception of its being the sum of our activities aided by grace operating upon us from without, in something of the way that steam-power acts upon the pistons of an engine, or the influence of a teacher acts upon a pupil,

that we have come to regard such words as either rhetorical exaggerations or as expressing some "experience" known only to the Saints. On the contrary, they are really, substantially and literally true of every baptized Christian who has not forfeited the grace of God by mortal sin, or who has recovered it by contrition and absolution. This fact should be obvious to anyone who remembers that the Epistles of the New Testament were written, not to an inner, esoteric circle, but to that average, sinning and repenting, largely busy, poor mass of newly-converted Christians in such places as were Corinth, Ephesus, Colosse and Rome in the first century of our era. Replace these names with those of Marseilles, London, New York, Berlin, Paris as they are to-day, and we shall have a better idea of the conditions under which the Christian was taught to think of himself in that age. The average Christian of to-day, imbued with a low, inadequate even if not false conception of the Christian life, derived from four centuries of Protestantism which, whatever virtues may be ascribed to it, was from the outset rooted in false ideas of human nature and grace, suffers from an "inferiority complex," and needs the exhortation of St. Leo the Great, "Christian, consider thy dignity," that, so inspired by the knowledge of what the Christian life is he may "go on to perfection," as one who has within himself by the gifts of truth and grace the power to attain to that Vision of God for which he was created and in which alone his true happiness is to be found. Lacking this knowledge it is little wonder that the Christian ideal is pronounced to be impossible, and that so many Christians settle down to a mere observance of "obligations," or to a round of practices of various degrees of value which, in fact, do little to advance, and may seriously impede the growth of the spiritual life. For that growth is an interior one, a development of the "inner man" under the influence of the Divine life of grace, a growing up from spiritual childhood "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. iv, 13), the growth of a life which at every stage needs its proper treatment, food and care, just as

does our physical life. The Christian is not meant to remain in the kindergarten or preparatory school of the spiritual life, nor to go on being fed with milk when he needs the meat of the strong. And he who would learn to "put away childish things" (1 Cor. xiii, 11), and to "put on the new man which according to God is created in justice and true holiness" (Eph. iv, 24), will find no safer nor surer guide than St. John of the Cross, who not only spreads before us the map of the way, but knowing it by experience, leads us step by step, from the foothills of the beginnings of the spiritual life to the heights which even if, for one cause or another, are beyond us, it is yet well to glimpse in the distance with the knowledge that, even if we reach them not in this life, the very sight of them will bring us farther on the way than we had dreamed to come. "God loves courageous souls," says St. Teresa, and the more we become familiar with the unique greatness and high dignity of the Christian life, the source and perfection of which is to be found in Jesus Christ, the more shall we realize the truth of St. John's words concerning the soul's union with God. "There is no need to wonder that the soul should be capable of attaining so high; for since God grants her the favour of being deified and united to the Most Holy Trinity, so that she becomes God by participation, why should it be thought incredible that she should exercise her work of understanding, knowledge and love in the Trinity, together with It, like the Trinity Itself, by a mode of participation which God effects in the soul herself?" (S.C. stanza xxxviii, 3).

FOLLOWING the plan indicated in chap. ii we propose to take the Christian and philosophic truths upon which St. John bases his teaching in order, and to devote our attention to the points in each upon which he lays emphasis, in order that, beginning with a knowledge of *what* he is talking about, we may come to a clearer understanding and appreciation of the conclusions which he arrives at, seeing how entirely justified and necessary they are. For the Saint's teaching would have received far less criticism than it has, even from Christian writers, had they not divorced his conclusions and his demands upon the soul from the truths upon which they are dependent and from which they naturally flow. Recalling, then, that he asserts his intention, whilst making use of his own and other's experience, to rely only upon Holy Scripture and the "sound sense and doctrine" of the Catholic Church, since "God desires not that any man by himself alone should believe his experiences to be of God, neither rely upon, nor conform himself to them, without the Church or her ministers" (A. II, xxii, 11), and "we must be guided in all things by the law of Christ made man, and by that of His Church, and of His ministers, in a human and visible manner, and by this way remedy our spiritual weaknesses and ignorances, since in these means we shall find abundant medicine for them all" (*ibid.* 7), we shall treat in this chapter of St. John's doctrine concerning the manner of the soul's approach to and attainment of that knowledge of God which is possible in this present life.

This may most fitly be done under three comprehensive points. First, the manner in which we arrive at the knowledge of what God is in Himself, that is, in His essential Being, Nature and Life. Second, the terms in which that essential Being which God is, is defined and described. Third, the manner of God's exterior activity, especially in creation, His revelation of Himself in and by His Word,

His Eternal Son, and the manner in which He deals with souls.

I. In the seeking of that knowledge of God which is eternal life we ascend by five steps, that of the practice of self-knowledge ; of knowledge gained by the consideration of creatures ; by faith in the revelation God has made of Himself ; by " the way of unknowing," the *Via Negativa* ; and by the communication of that " new and loving knowledge " which God imparts in contemplation. It is true that not all souls proceed in this order, the majority, in fact, begin with faith, passing on by the exercise of that virtue in the light it supplies, to see that " every common bush is afire with God " as Browning says, and from thence to the other steps. But since " faith perfects natural reason," and our object is to give an ordered account of St. John's teaching, it is most convenient to adopt the order he observes.

The first thing that the soul must achieve in order to come to the knowledge of God consists in " the practice of self-knowledge," by which she prepares herself for setting out upon this road, " by courage not to turn aside after delights and pleasures, and fortitude to conquer temptations and difficulties " (S.C. iv, 1). The soul " sets to work herself to seek Him," knowing that in the search for her Beloved she must practise virtues and mortifications in the contemplative and active life ; and to this end she must accept no favours or good things, nor must all the powers and snares of the three enemies—world, devil and flesh—suffice to detain or hinder her. So she says, " my Beloved, I will go over those mountains and banks. The mountains are the virtues and the banks " the mortifications, humiliations and self-denial which she practises in the active life . . . because the way to seek God is to do good in God continually and to mortify evil in oneself " (*ibid.* iii, 1, 2). The second redaction¹ adds " the soul clearly declares here that, to

¹ There are two editions of the *Spiritual Cantic*, the second of which has a different arrangement of the stanzas, and much additional matter in the commentary. For an account of these and of the controversy concern-

find God in truth, it suffices not to pray with the heart and with the tongue alone, nor yet to make use of the help of others ; but together with this, it is needful also to work with that which is in her power," and both redactions have " to seek God it requires a heart that is detached and strong, free from all evil and from good things which are not simply God " (*ibid.* iii, 4, 5).

The necessity of the ascetic preparation for the reception of the knowledge of God so clearly stated here, as by all Christian, and even pagan writers, may well be emphasized as a warning to those who imagine that the way of the Christian and mystical life can be understood by non-Christian critics like M. Baruzi, Bergson and Delacroix, or even by those who approach it from the standpoint of Paul Elmer More. Nor is this less true of the dilettante Christian, " at once pious and frivolous," who seeks self-satisfaction and comfort in the practice of religion more than to come to the knowledge of God to which all the things of religion are meant to tend. To seek God first and above all things is the one thing necessary and that search demands an ascetic self-renunciation and training without which all other means, even those of prayer and the sacraments, will be useless. For the one essential way of this seeking, St. John repeats again and again, is the following of Christ and " to be intent upon nothing, save only upon founding the will in humble love, working diligently, suffering and thus imitating the Son of God in His life and mortifications, for this is the way by which to come to all spiritual good " (A. II, xxix, 9).

St. John, then, is neither an " intellectualist," a seeker of knowledge for its own sake, nor a " spiritualist " who, as did the Illuminists and false mystics, substitutes an esoteric gnosis which divorces soul from body, leaving the latter to go its own way whilst the former indulges itself in fantastic imaginations, for it is by the " strait gate " alone that the

ing the authenticity of the second redaction, the reader may consult vol. ii. of Professor Peer's edition, and the bibliography in Fr. Bruno's *Life of St. John*. The present writer accepts the claim of the second redaction to be the work of the Saint.

soul enters upon that "narrow way" which leads toward the union of loving knowledge with God. From beginning to end of the Saint's works there is a sanity and balance too often lacking in some mystical writers; ascend as high as he will his feet are on the earth, and he never forgets that the heights he seeks are only reached by the soul which beginning in self-knowledge sinks ever lower into its own nothingness wherein at last it finds God who dwells with the humble spirit. "It is to be noted that, in order to know how to find this Spouse (so far as may be in this life), the Word, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is hidden essentially in the inmost centre of the soul. Wherefore the soul that would find Him through union of love must go forth and hide itself from all created things according to the will, and enter within itself in deepest recollection . . . esteeming all that is in the world as though it were not" (S.C. i, 4). But when St. John, in company with all the guides of the spiritual life, places "the practice of self-knowledge as the first step in the search for God," he does not intend this to mean only, or even chiefly, knowledge of our sinfulness, a limitation frequently imposed by modern and less skilled writers. He means the answer to Augustine's question, *Quid ego sum, Deus? Quæ natura sum?* What am I then, O my God? What nature am I? Such a self-knowledge as includes what man is by nature as God created it and endowed it with immense gifts of soul and body which make it a capacity for God, filling it with that desire for its good and perfection which, as Aquinas teaches, is a desire for God Himself, man's Supreme Good and Source of all good. He means, too, what man is by all the gifts of truth and grace, by which that nature has been supernaturalized and made capable of the Beatific Vision. And then, for it is only when a man begins to see all this that he can see what he has made himself, the knowledge of his sin by which the Divine Image within him has been blurred and debased. Self-knowledge is, in Pascal's phrase, to know both "the grandeur and the misery of man," to know, in the words of Hugh of St. Victor, "his

own condition and place, what he owes to things above him and beneath and to himself, to understand what he has been made, how he should conduct himself, what he should do and not do " (*De Sacramentis*, I, vi, 15).

There is significance, too, in the fact that St. John does not speak simply of " self-knowledge " but of " the practice of self-knowledge," that is of all that activity by which a man sets himself to live as that which God has made him, endeavours to realize all the potentialities of his being, seeks to overcome all that hinders his true life, uses all the means by which he may come " to be to the praise of the grace " of God. Here is all that side of the Christian life necessary to the beginner and throughout the Purgative way, that side so necessary that it is often forgotten that it is not the whole, and that the utmost activity of the soul aided by grace cannot accomplish the whole work of its sanctification and bring it to union with God. " For however earnestly the beginner practises the mortification in himself of all these actions and passions of his, never, however much he endeavour, can he succeed until God works it in him passively by means of the purgation of the said dark night " (*D.N.* I, vii, 5). " As the soul grows in spirituality, the more it ceases from the operation of its faculties in particular acts, for it becomes more and more engaged in one act that is general and pure ; so that the faculties by which the soul walked, cease working now that the end is reached, even as the feet stop and cease to move when the journey is over " (*A.* II, xii, 6). For both the activity engaged in overcoming and regulating the passions of the lower nature and that busied in the prayer of meditation fail in attaining that perfection of union to which St. John would lead the soul.

II. After the practice of self-knowledge the consideration of the creatures is the first thing upon this spiritual road " by which consideration and knowledge the soul rises " to the knowledge of her Beloved, the Creator . . . by means of them the soul considers His greatness and excellence, according to the words of the Apostle where he says : *Invisibilia*

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enim ipsius a creatura mundi per ea quæ facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur (Rom. i, 20). Which is as much as to say, the invisible things of God are known by the soul through created things, visible and invisible (S.C. iv, 1). St. John is reminded of the striking passage in the *Confessions* (Bk. X, vi) in which St. Augustine questions the things of earth about God, "I asked the whole frame of the world about my God; and it answered me, I am not He, but He made me," and says, "My questioning them was my thoughts upon them; and their answering was the beauty I found in them."

In the exposition of stanza v,

Scattering a thousand graces,
He passed through these groves in haste,
And beholding them as He went,
Left them clothed with the beauty,
Of His form alone,

the Saint says that "the creatures make answer to the soul, which answer . . . is the testimony which in themselves they give to the soul concerning the greatness and excellence of God, for which the soul asked in its meditation," which answer "in its substance is that God created all things with great ease and brevity, and in them left some traces of who He was." We shall have to return to this passage when considering St. John's doctrine of God as Creator, and will confine ourselves here to the place this meditation upon creatures occupies in the search after the knowledge of God.

This manner of approach to the knowledge that God is, and further, to something of what He is, by proceeding from effects to the necessity of a First, Efficient and Final Cause and Reason of all things, and from the nature and character of creatures to the nature and attributes of God by the way of analogy, is man's natural and instinctive path by the avenue of the created to the uncreated. Confronted with the spectacle of the created universe the human mind ought, and naturally does, infer the existence of the Creator and may arrive at some conception of what He is in the sense, not of His Essence but of what may rightly

be ascribed to Him as qualities or attributes, although it will become more and more plain that no quality, attribute or term can be thought of as being *in* God as they are in the creature. So natural is this path to man that both the writer of the book of Wisdom and St. Paul reproach the pagan world in general for not following it.

That path through nature has been largely closed by the modern failure to discern the "form" underlying the material, a failure which has become increasingly common ever since the later humanists of the Renaissance turned from the exaltation of man in the place of God to the exaltation of nature at the expense of man. In the nineteenth century this movement was accelerated by the advance of the physical sciences which, however, now tend to drift into the realm of a hazy, idealistic philosophy, or into the dialectical materialism of the Communist ideology. Some English scientists, indeed, have partly recovered their sight hinting that the "Mysterious Universe" points to the existence of a Mind behind it. Some philosophers invent new forms of Pantheism, identifying the universe with God, whilst opponents of religion insist that the presence of evil in the universe disproves the existence of God. On the religious side, too, much misapprehension exists, due largely to ignorance of the Christian philosophic tradition and of the actual attitude of the Saints to the natural world. St. John of the Cross, for instance, is too commonly regarded as holding a dark and pessimistic view of nature, such as was common to Manichæism, Jansenism and Puritanism, an idea which a knowledge of his life and writings shows to be totally unwarranted. We know that he loved the garden of *Los Martires* at Granada and, as Luis de San Angel tells us, "introduced the custom of going out to the *huerta* to make mental prayer amongst the trees," and on one occasion bade his companions "See how these little animals, God's creatures, praise Him. Lift up your minds; and since creatures without reason or intelligence do so, have we not a far greater obligation to praise Him." Created things were to him "crumbs that have fallen from the table of God,"

designed not to satisfy, as they cannot, but to whet the appetite of the children of God that they may "rise from feeding upon crumbs, which are the creatures, to the table of the uncreated spirit of their Father" (A. I, vi, 3). And all his doctrine of detachment from creatures leads not to a Puritanic fear or despidal of them but to a right appreciation and use of them, as is shown in this commendation of the meditation upon creatures under consideration, as well as by his continuous use of examples and illustrations from created things in his poems and expositions. "For," as he says, "the spiritual man will find greater joy and recreation in the creatures through his detachment from them, for he cannot rejoice in them if he regard them with attachment to them *as his own*. Attachment is an anxiety that, like a bond, ties the spirit down to earth, and allows it no freedom of heart. By his detachment from things, he gains also a clear conception of them, so that he can well understand the truths relating to them, both naturally and supernaturally" (A. III, xx, 2). Again, in chap. xxv, speaking of the delights of the senses, he teaches that when we raise the thoughts, affections and will to God, so that "the thought of God gives more delight than the movement of sense which causes it, and but for that he finds no pleasure in the said movement, this is a sign that he is receiving benefit therefrom, and that this thing of sense is a help to his spirit. In this way such things may be used, for then such things of sense subserve the end for which God created them, which is that He should be better loved and known because of them." And in the following chapter of *The Ascent*, "to him that is pure, all things, whether high or low, are an occasion of greater good and further purity. . . . But he that overcomes not the joy of desire will not enjoy the serenity of habitually rejoicing in God through His creatures and works." In the fifth stanza of *The Spiritual Canticle* St. John speaks first of meditation upon creatures in all their wonder and variety, by which in the early stages of the Christian life "the soul is greatly moved to love God," and later of the same "according to

the sense and the affection of contemplation " in which the soul sees more clearly how God not only communicated to creatures " their being and natural graces when He beheld them in His Son, but also in this image of His Son alone He clothed them with beauty, communicating to them supernatural being. This was when He became man, and thus exalted man in the beauty of God, thus exalting all the creatures in him, since in uniting Himself with man He united Himself with the nature of them all."

We cannot say for certain whether or not St. John had read the works of the Victorine School, the mystics of the twelfth century, but we do know that he was familiar with those of St. Augustine, Dionysius and St. Gregory the Great, from whom, in great measure, Hugh, Richard and Adam of St. Victor derived their symbolical and sacramental view of the created universe, so that for them mystical contemplation had a wider meaning than it came to have in later times. And St. John's doctrine in *The Spiritual Canticle* referred to above bears a strong resemblance to the Victorine teaching founded in the conception of the whole world as a mirror which reflects the power and beauty of the Creator, and through which in mystical contemplation the mind is raised to God the Supreme Reality of whom creatures are the veil, or each a word of the Word Himself whose voice is heard in contemplation of the letter through which He speaks to man. Not, indeed, that one so steeped in Holy Scripture with its sense of " the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handiwork " as was St. John, needed any other teacher to suggest to him that exalted conception of the creature which not only here but elsewhere in his writings is manifestly revealed. But it has affinities with that wider view of the contemplation of creatures, Augustinian, Victorine and Bonaventurian, which are worthy of note.

St. John is not only seized and possessed with that sacramental view and sense of nature which is so eminently Christian, but with that which is even more distinctively Christian, the view of all creation as orientated toward God,

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that which so fills the pages of his master in philosophy and theology, St. Thomas, and is so exquisitely expressed by Dante, who had drunk at the same spring,

La provvidenza che cotanto assetta,
del suo lume fa il ciel sempre quieto,
nel qual si volge quel ch' ha maggior fretta :
Ed ora lì, cum' a sito decreto,
cen porta la virtù di quella corda,
Che ciò che scocca drizza in segno lieto.

(That providence, whose light enwraps the heavens in calm quietude, and orders all creation well, so that to it with speed intent turn all things, and we are borne, as to our destined place, by the force of that strong cord, which as that of bow ne'er aims its arrow but at the mark prepared.)

All nature is drawn toward God as flower turns to the sun, as steel flings to a magnet, seeks its perfection in Him who is at once the Cause and Reason of its being and its perfected End.

III. Attention has been drawn already (*vide* chap. ii) to the fact that St. John, writing more directly from a mystic standpoint than that of the speculative theologian, often gives a sense to the terms he uses which goes beyond that which they connote in ordinary theological phraseology. This is the case with his exposition of the meaning and place of faith in the spiritual life. Occasionally he uses the term in the ordinary sense, as when he says that " Faith is a habit of the soul, certain and obscure. And the reason for its being an obscure habit is that it makes us believe truths revealed by God Himself, which are above all natural light, and exceed all human understanding. . . . It tells us of things which we have never seen or understood, in themselves, or in anything that resembles them, since they are unlike anything we know. And thus we have no light of natural knowledge concerning them, since that which we are told of them has no proportion to any sense of ours ; we know it by the ear alone, believing that which we are taught, subjecting and blinding our natural light to that of faith. For, as St. Paul says, *Fides ex auditu*. As though he had

said : Faith is not knowledge which enters by any of the senses, but is only the assent of the soul to that which enters by hearing " (A. II, iii, 1-4), and farther on " faith tells us what cannot be understood with the intellect. Wherefore St. Paul spoke of it *ad Hebræos* after this manner : *Fides est sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non apparentium*. Which we understand to mean that faith is the substance of things hoped for ; and, although the intellect assents thereto, firmly and certainly, they are not things which are revealed to the intellect ; for, if they were revealed to it, there would be no more faith. So faith, though it gives certainty to the intellect, does not give clearness, but obscurity " (A. II, vi, 2). Here, faith is plainly that supernatural gift by which we are enabled to believe in God and in the truths which He has revealed through His Church, a gift which, as the Saint says, gives certainty to the intellect which, in the words of St. Thomas, faith perfects. But faith does not give comprehension or full knowledge, this is the meaning of the phrase " they are not things *revealed* to the intellect," as is explained in *The Spiritual Canticle*, " all that can be known of God in this life, much though it be, is not true knowledge, for it is knowledge in part and very far off, while to know Him essentially " (i.e. in His essence) " is true knowledge " (stanza vi, 4). " Faith," teaches that eminent theologian, Jean de Saint Thomas, " alone and bare leaves us in obscurity . . . it does not contemplate but *assents* obscurely ; and it seems that the heavens and things celestial are more hidden than opened to it " (*The Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, i, 12).

St. John is mainly occupied with this faith raised to a higher degree, by love and by the gifts of Understanding, Knowledge and Wisdom, to which he gives the titles " pure," " infused " and " dark and loving knowledge, which is faith " and " serves as a means of Divine union in this life, even as, in the next, the light of glory serves as a means to the clear vision of God " (A. II, xxiv, 4). Of this we shall speak later, since what is before us now is the Saint's teaching upon that degree of faith which he gives

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in stanzas vii and xi of *The Spiritual Canticle*. The soul having been "wounded with love for her Spouse, by reason of the knowledge of Him that the irrational creation has given her ; in this present stanza describes herself as wounded with love by reason of another higher knowledge of the Beloved that she receives from the rational creation namely, angels and men, who are nobler than the former." She speaks of a "dying of love," "to know fully that which is still hidden under the veils of the Faith," of "three kinds of pain which come to the soul from the Beloved, corresponding to three kinds of knowledge that can be had of Him." The first of these is "called a wound . . . because it is born of the knowledge that the soul receives from creatures, which are the lowest works of God. . . . The second is called a sore . . . made in the soul by means of the knowledge of the works of the Incarnation of the Word and mysteries of the Faith. . . . The third kind of pain in love is like to dying . . . and this dying of love is effected in the soul by means of a touch of highest knowledge of the Divinity which is the 'something' whereof, as it is said in this stanza, 'they are stammering.'"

All as they serve relate to me
A thousand graces of Thine,
Each wounding me the more
And leaving me to die
Of that something they are but stammering.

Since compared with the essential reality of the Divinity, that which the mysteries of the Faith convey is as an inarticulate and halting stammering which cannot form the whole word meant.

We are here in face of the necessity of distinguishing between the facts in themselves of which the articles of the Faith speak, and the dogmatic formula in which the facts are expressed in those inadequate, yet sufficient terms of human language in which alone the facts are communicable to us. The facts and the dogmas are not identical nor do the latter contain or fully express the facts of the Divine order, for, as St. John repeats a thousand times, no language,

term, notion, concept, idea formed in the mind is capable of representing God as He is, since they are all derived from sensible things to none of which is God like, for "although it may be admitted that creatures are in some sort like God, it must in no wise be admitted that God is like creatures" (S.T. I, iv, 3, Res. 4). Faith, then, does not find its terminus in the dogma but in the fact, it assents to the dogma as the necessary and sufficient definition and guardian of the fact, the terms of which as defined by the Church are to be taken in the meaning she gives them. But both St. Thomas and St. John teach that faith is more than an assent, since as says the former, "it is a kind of participation in Divine truth," and "by faith Divine things abide in us" (*De Potentia*, Q. vi, Art. ix), and St. John that "faith is the wondrous means which leads to the goal, which is God" (A. II, ii, 1), "for the soul is not united to God in this life through understanding, nor through enjoyment, nor through the imagination, nor through any sense whatever; but only through faith, according to the intellect; and through hope, according to the memory; and through love, according to the will" (*ibid.* vi, 1).

This pure faith is "faith which worketh by love" (Gal. v, 6), and as St. James says, is made perfect by works "whereby we love God without comprehending Him" (S.C., Prologue 2), as says St. Peter, "whom having not seen, ye love" (1 Pet. i, 8), the full content of which is gathered up and set forth by St. John in the eleventh stanza of *The Spiritual Canticle*:

O crystalline fount,
If on that thy silvery surfaces,
Thou wouldst suddenly form
The eyes desired
Borne outlined in my heart.

This is the cry of the soul to faith "as to the one who shall give her the most vivid light from her Beloved . . . for indeed there is no other way by which a soul may come to true union with God, according as the Spouse declareth

through Hosea, saying, *I will betroth Me unto thee in faithfulness* " (ii, 20). She says, then, to faith, with great desire : " O faith of Christ, my Spouse ! If thou wouldst but show forth clearly the truths concerning my Beloved which obscurely and darkly thou has infused into my soul, so that that which thou containest in faith, which is formless knowledge, thou mightest discover and reveal, withdrawing thyself from it, suddenly, formally and completely, turning it all into a manifestation of glory."

Faith is called " crystalline " (a play upon the Spanish " cristalina " and " Cristo ") because it is of Christ " and because it has the properties of crystal in being pure in its truths, and strong and clear, free from errors and natural forms." And " a fount " because " there flows from it to the soul the waters of all spiritual blessings " as our Lord said to the Samaritan woman (John iv, 14, cf. vii, 39). The articles of the Faith are called " silvery surfaces," faith being " compared to silver with regard to the propositions which it teaches us, and the truths and substance which they contain in themselves are compared to gold ; for that same substance which we now believe, clothed and covered with the silver of faith, we shall behold and enjoy in the life to come, fully revealed and with the gold of faith made bare." Here we have the distinction, noted above, between the dogmas and the facts with which the dogmas are concerned, which " in this life faith sets forth to us darkly and obscured by a veil " (cf. St. Paul's " now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face "). " So that faith gives and communicates God Himself to us ; but covered with the silver of faith " ; but it does give Him in truth, even as a golden vessel is given though the exterior of it be covered with silver.

" The eyes desired " by the soul are the rays of the Divine truths themselves which are said to be outlined in its innermost parts because they are infused by faith, yet as this knowledge of faith is not perfect knowledge, these truths are, as it were, only outlined and need to be filled in, as the Apostle says, " Now we know in part . . . but when

that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away" (1 Cor. xiii, 9-10), as a finished painting perfects the outline which prepared for it. "But beside this outline of faith there is another outline in the soul of the lover, which is of love, according to the will: in which the image of the Beloved is outlined in such manner, and so conjoined and vividly pictured, when there is union of love, that it is true to say that the Beloved lives in the lover and the lover in the Beloved."

Never in St. John is knowledge anything but that which "worketh by love," he commonly speaks of it as "loving knowledge," "knowledge in love," and this because, as with all he writes of, he is thinking of it in relation to its end, perfect union of the love of God. Trained in the schools as he was, he was familiar with the teaching of St. Thomas that the intellect is superior to the will in that its adequate object is God Himself, Supreme Being, whilst the object of the will is the good, which is a quality of being, being viewed as desirable. Moreover the essential beatitude of man consists in the Vision of God, by which sight of the mind illumined by the *lumen gloriæ*, man possesses that full knowledge of Him which is eternal life, of which knowledge, as says Dante, "love is aftergrowth." Thus St. Thomas insists that "only that which is known can be loved," but also that a thing can be loved more than it is known, so that on earth it is better to love God than to know Him, whilst the reverse is true of things lower than God, for in order to know God, we, in a way, draw Him toward ourselves and represent Him to ourselves by ideas which cannot express Him as He is, whilst in loving Him, we are borne and raised towards Him as He is in Himself. Yet it is obvious that there must be some knowledge of God before He can be loved, and St. John says that "with regard to those who say that the will cannot love, save what the intellect first understands, that has to be understood after a natural manner; for in our human way it is impossible to love if one understands not first that which is to be loved; but in the supernatural life God can easily infuse

love and increase it without infusing or increasing distinct knowledge. . . . And this is the experience of many spiritual persons, who often find themselves burning in the love of God without any increase of a distinct knowledge of Him ; for some can understand little and love much, and some can understand much and love little. But usually those spiritual persons who have not a very great understanding concerning God excel in will ; and infused faith suffices them in the place of intellectual knowledge " (S.C. xvii, 6).

All meditation, in which the natural faculties of the soul, intellect, reason, memory, imagination are occupied upon Divine truths, has for its end the exciting of the will to desire God. " We meditate," says St. François de Sales, " in order to bring forth love," not simply that we may know more about God, but that whatever knowledge we may have or gain may be transformed into love, as Joseph of the Holy Spirit says that meditation " is an act of the intellect passing from one consideration to another . . . its occupation being above all the search for that devotion which determines the will to love, so that love is really the final end of the act of the intellect " (*Mystica Isagoge*, IV, ix, 2, Tome I, edit. 1720).

IV. The *Via Negativa* or " way of Unknowing." This fourth step in coming to the knowledge of God is so necessary to the understanding of St. John, and also has been so misrepresented and caricatured where not ignored altogether by modern writers unfamiliar with the primary postulates of Catholic theology, that no apology is necessary for treating it at length, the less so in that it is not merely a question of speculative theology but one which bears upon and has practical consequences in the spiritual life. The relevant passages in St. John may first be noted. " In order to come into union with the wisdom of God, the soul has to proceed rather by unknowing than by knowing " (A. I, iv, 5).

" That which the soul seeks . . . is beyond even the highest thing which can be known or experienced " (that is by any operation of its natural manner of knowing and experiencing), " and thus a soul must pass beyond everything to unknowing " (*ibid.* II, iv, 4).

WAYS TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

"None of these kinds of knowledge can lead the intellect direct to God . . . in order to reach Him, a soul must rather proceed by not understanding than by desiring to understand" (*A.* II, viii, 5).

"The soul must proceed in its growing knowledge of God by learning that which He is not, rather than that which He is" (*ibid.* III, ii, 3).

"In order to approach God, the soul must proceed by not comprehending rather than by comprehending" (*ibid.* III, v, 3).

"The perfections of union with God . . . as they are things not knowable after a human manner, must be humanly approached by unknowing and divine ignorance" (*D.N.* II, xvii, 7).

"Never desire to be satisfied with that which thou understandest of God, but rather with that which thou understandest not of Him, and never content thyself with loving and delighting in that which thou understandest or feelest concerning God, but do thou love and delight in that which thou canst not understand and feel concerning Him . . . and be not like many ignorant persons who think unworthily of God, imagining that when they have no understanding or sensible feeling or experience of God, that He is farther away or more hidden from them; the truth being rather the contrary that, the less distinctly they understand Him, the nearer they are approaching to Him" (*S.C.*, Second Redaction, i, 12).

What reasons underlie these statements which are common to not only mystic writers but to the theologian? Principally two, first, the nature of the Being of God, and second, the nature of human knowledge, both of which are plainly stated in Holy Scripture.

First "God is Spirit," declares our Lord (*John* iv, 24), whom no man hath seen "save He which is of God" (*ibid.* vi, 24), "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen or can see" (*1 Tim.* vi, 16). "To whom," then asks God by *Isaiah*, "will ye liken Me, and make Me equal, and compare Me, that we may be like?"

. . . I am God, and there is none like Me " (Is. xlvi, 5, 9). The specific condemnation of idolatry in the Old Testament is founded in the fact that no image or representation of God can be like Him who is pure Spirit, and this is as true of images or ideas conceived in the mind as it is of those formed by men's hands. For both are the product of reflection upon visible and material things, results of that knowledge which comes through the senses and which is incapable of knowing God as He is. One passage from St. John will suffice here since it contains the gist of what he repeats page after page upon this point. " Among all the creatures, the highest or the lowest, there is none that comes near to God or bears any resemblance to His Being. For although it is true that all creatures have, as theologians say, a certain relation to God, and bear a Divine impress (some more and others less, according to what is more or less dominant in their nature),¹ yet there is no essential resemblance or connection between them and God—on the contrary, the distance between their being and His Divine Being is infinite " (A. II, viii, 3).

Turning to the second reason, the nature of human knowledge, it is to be noted that the *active* capacity of the intellect is the lowest in the scale of intellectual beings, that is, God, the Angels, man ; and this, because it does not grasp truth by intuition, as do the angels, but by the processes of reason, which is an " imperfection of the intellect " as St. Thomas says (S.T. II, II, xlix, 5), " the intellect and reason are not different powers, but are distinct as the perfect from the imperfect . . . the intellect means, an intimate penetration of truth, the reason, inquiry and discourse." This low estate of man's rational capacity is a consequence of his having a body, not that this is necessary for his intellectual activity in itself, but because the natural object

¹ Thus, the Angels, being pure spirits, have a closer relation to and a greater likeness to God than man whose nature is a composite of matter and spirit, also because they have a more immediate intuitive knowledge of God than man, whose natural knowledge comes from his perception of the works of God and is of a discursive character. But as mind in which is the image of God dominates man's nature as its highest possession, man has more of the Divine impress than any other creature of earth.

of the human intellect is that which is accessible to the senses through which its knowledge comes. But the mind of man is not limited by its *natural* object, for it can pass beyond it, and moreover, what is naturally knowable to it does not entirely fill or satisfy it. Beyond that which is its natural object, there is an object adequate to the mind, for which it has a passive capacity, and that object is God Himself. "Canst thou by searching find God?" asks Zophar, and the answer is "No." No creature can attain to the knowledge of *what* God is in Himself by its own activity, but that which God knows of Himself He can communicate to man. "No intellectual creature can see God in the Divine essence, unless God Himself bring this about . . . in order that the created intellect see God's substance, the Divine essence itself must be united to the intellect as an intelligible form" (*Contra Gentiles*, III, lii). Man has a natural desire for God, and since "no natural desire can be in vain," he has a natural capacity for arriving at the knowledge that God exists and at some conception, gathered from His works, of His nature, which is as far as he can go by himself. But he has the possibility within him, a possibility of passive capacity, of receiving all of God that He wills to bestow, and that all, as our Lord declares, is nothing less than God Himself. But in order that this may be so, the soul must empty itself of all other knowledge of God which, true as far as it goes, is not knowledge of the essential Being of God; it must enter "the dark night of faith," the "cloud of Unknowing" as an English mystic of the fourteenth century calls it, and for this the doctrine of the *Via Negativa* prepares it.

That doctrine—which is to be found in Clement of Alexandria—receives its fullest expression in Dionysius (c. 500)—and is succinctly stated by St. Thomas in the words "we cannot know what God is, but rather what He is not; we have no means of knowing how God is, but rather how He is not" (S.T. I, iii, introd.). And this is so because "the Divine essence surpasses every form to which our intellect reaches; and thus we cannot apprehend it by knowing what it is. But we have some knowledge thereof

by knowing *what it is not*: and we shall approach all the nearer to the knowledge thereof as we shall be enabled to remove by our intellect a greater number of things therefrom. For the more completely we see how a thing differs from others, the more completely we know it: since each thing has in itself its own being distinct from all other things" (*Contra Gentiles*, I, xiv).

The truth underlying these statements is that the human mind, even when aided by faith, cannot comprehend the essential Being of God. It can know *that* He is and much of and about Him, it cannot know *what* He is, since not only is He uniquely other than all creatures so that there is nothing to which He can be compared, but also because His Essential Self is only seen by the mind after this life. Holy Scripture—we have seen—is plain on both these points. Further, whenever and however we seek some knowledge of God we are obliged to think that knowledge, and to state it in an analogical way. Thus no terms we use of God mean the same as when we use them of creatures. We say that God is love and that He is Spirit, and here indeed we are using language in a sense we cannot use it of man, since man is not spirit only nor is he love though he may be "loving." But God *is* Love, the terms are interchangeable when used of Him, and when we say He is Spirit there is no way of our getting any idea of what that means except by saying He is not a body, nor is there anything material about Him, nor any potentiality—the possibility of being any other than that which He eternally is, and so on. That is, we proceed by way of negation—the *Via Negativa*—all our positive affirmations concerning Him are the consequence of our affirming that He is not this or that. The not uncommon idea that the *Via Negativa* only results in reducing God to Nothing is quite untrue; on the contrary it is the only way that we can form some conception of God which is worthy of His unique existence, and are protected from the many errors into which ignorance or rejection of this way leads, as in the case of a popular writer who in one of his books grossly misstates the doctrine and implications of the *Via*

Negativa, and in another of his writings conceives of God as so dependent on the universe as to wonder what He would have to think about if the universe came to an end ! Far from reducing God to Nothing the Catholic theologians have given a much more worthy and full conception of God than anyone else has done. Whether we begin with asserting that God is this or that, or by denying that He is this or that we arrive at equally positive conclusions. We may affirm that God is truth, justice, mercy, infinite, eternal, etc., or, on the other hand, that God cannot lie or be unjust or unmerciful, that He is not limited or changeable. None of these negations imply lack or poverty or privation, on the contrary, they imply that God is the Fulness of Being. We may even and indeed must deny that He is personal or rational in the sense that we use these terms of men, but this is to assert that He is supra-personal and super-rational because in Him all attributes or qualities *are* His Being, are not simply attached to It as with man. The theologian writing a treatise on God begins with the affirmation of His Simplicity, which means that He is not a collection of parts or qualities, as is a creature, but as St. Augustine says, "He is all that He has," that He is One in a unique and singular sense, that in Him to be and to live, essence and existence are one, that what we ascribe to Him as attributes are only the way in which we are obliged to *think* of that Full, Self-existent Unity which He is. The nature of the human mind compels it to an analysis, a conceiving of God as this and as that, as if this and that were distinct in Him, whereas His infinity is His eternity, His wisdom is His love, His mercy is His justice, etc. He *is* Infinity and Eternity, Wisdom and love, mercy and justice, etc. (cf. S.C. III, 2 ff.).

All this, it must be remembered, concerns our knowledge of God as He is in Himself, eternally existing in His own Essence, apart from, before and altogether independent of creatures, God as He is and would be were there no creation at all. And it is, as we shall see St. John teaches, this absolute otherness of God, that He is different to creatures not merely in degree but in kind, which determines the fact

that in order to attain to Him as He is, all ideas, images and notions which the imagination forms of Him must be laid aside, and the soul must proceed "by not understanding rather than by desiring to understand."

— This does not mean that all the earlier steps of which the Saint speaks have been useless any more than the lessons and means of the kindergarten and preparatory school are for a good education. It only means that, as St. Paul says, we are not to go on thinking as children when we have come to adult age, and that just as the knowledge gained at school is not lost but submerged in the greater knowledge it has enabled us to attain, so the knowledge of God gained in the early ways of the spiritual life is swallowed up in that knowledge which is truer and fuller as it is less dependent on the natural activity of the mind and is that of a pure faith.

The last step toward the knowledge of God possible in this life consists in an act of God Himself in which He "communicates Himself" to the soul "passively, even as to one who has his eyes open, so that light is communicated to him passively, without his doing more than keeping them open. And this reception of light, which is infused supernaturally, is passive understanding. We say that the soul works not at all, not because it understands not, but because it understands things not discovered by its own industry and receives only that which is given to it, as comes to pass in the illuminations and enlightenments or inspirations of God" (A. II, xv, 2).

The consideration of this will best be left until a study of some further preliminary truths enables us to better understand this high gift of God. Suffice to say here that it is nothing less than the loving knowledge which God has of Himself communicated to His lovers that they may participate in His happiness, not simply knowing as they are known, but loving as they are loved.

ST. JOHN'S doctrine of God is so rich compared with the thin and attenuated ideas of our time, and so dominates all the rest of his teaching that it merits an attentive consideration. This we shall attempt under two heads: 1. As to God Himself, 2. As to God in relation to creatures.

1. "It is a very easy thing to judge of the Being and greatness of God less worthily and nobly than befits His incomprehensible nature" (A. III, xi, 1), and this is so because all our thinking and speaking of God must necessarily be in relation to things which come under the apprehension of our sensible faculties, which things, if we forget that they can only be thought of in an analogous manner with reference to God, tend to drag down our conception of God to a human level. For instance, in thinking of God as Father we are obliged to rest upon what we know of human fatherhood, or in thinking of God as great our minds ascend from created greatness, and there is constant need of mentally removing all the limitations and deficiencies which are attached to human fatherhood or created greatness when we apply these terms to God. It is the failure to do this which leads to such a common saying as that if God were Father He could or would not permit sin and suffering to exist. But apart from the fact that human fathers know the necessity at times of allowing or inflicting suffering upon their children in view of a greater good which the child is incapable of understanding or appreciating, there is the fact that Fatherhood in God means infinitely more than all that we can possibly know here on earth. For the Fatherhood of God is not derived from His relation to creatures but is the eternal Cause of that relation. God did not become Father in and by creating, He is eternally Father, would be Father if He had never created at all, since His Fatherhood is His relation to His Eternal Son in the interior,

self-subsistent life of the Holy Trinity, "of whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named" (Eph. iii, 15). "God is incomprehensible and transcends the understanding" (*L.F.* iii, 41), "in His One and simple Being, in all the virtues and grandeurs of His attributes; for He is omnipotent, wise, good, merciful, just, strong and loving, and has other infinite attributes whereof we have no knowledge here below; . . . each of these things is the very Being of God in one single simple reality, which is the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit, each attribute being God Himself" (*L.F.* iii, 2). "God has no form or figure" (*ibid.* iii, 44), "no form or likeness" (*A.* II, xvi, 8; cf. Deut. iv, 15), so that "the eye cannot see Him, or aught that is like Him; neither can the ear hear His voice, nor any sound that resembles it; . . . even so, says Isaiah, Eye hath not seen Him, nor hath ear heard Him, neither hath it entered into the heart of man" (*ibid.* III, xxxiv, 2). "Among all the creatures, highest or lowest, there is none that comes near to God or bears any resemblance to His Being" (*ibid.* II, viii, 3), "all the being of creation compared with the infinite Being of God, is nothing" (*ibid.* I, iv, 4), "there is naught that equals God" (*ibid.* I, v, 5), and this is as true of the highest spiritual experiences as of the things of earth, "the highest thing that can be felt or experienced concerning God is infinitely remote from God, and from the pure possession of Him" (*ibid.* II, iv, 4), "no form or figure or image or any other kind of knowledge that can come to the memory can be God, neither can be like Him, whether it be of heaven or earth, natural or supernatural, even as David teaches, when he says: Lord, among the gods there is none like unto Thee" (*ibid.* II, xi, 1). "For the creatures, whether terrestrial or celestial, and all distinct images and kinds of knowledge, that can be apprehended by the faculties of the soul, however lofty they may be in this life, have no comparison or proportion with the Being of God, since God falls within no genus or species, as they do, according as the theologians tell us. And the soul in this life is not capable of receiving in a clear and distinct manner aught save that which falls

into a genus or a species" (A. III, xii, 1). It must be remarked that St. John does not say that there is *no* resemblance or correspondence between our ideas and pictures of God and God Himself, but that none of our ideas and pictures *are* God Himself, or are proximate means of union with Him. There is a sense in which God may be said to be a fire, a mountain, a tranquil night, etc., images St. John himself uses, yet God is not a mountain, nor although the picture does convey a truth about God, does it unite us to the Truth that He is. Thus good and necessary as is such picturing in its place and time it must be laid aside for the higher exercise of pure faith.

But, it may be asked, does not all this make God so utterly removed from man, so, as it were, dissolved into incomprehensibility that He becomes unreal, a mere name which conveys nothing that the mind can lay hold of, the soul fall back upon in its need? The question implies a tendency to that anthropomorphism which we are told some of the monks of the desert suffered from, so that one of them being taught that no human figure or mental image could adequately represent the incomprehensible God, cried out, "They have taken away my God! To whom shall I betake me? To whom make my prayer? Whom adore? I no longer know" (Cassian, *Confer.* X, iii). But a little thought will show the truth that any conception of God which in any way identifies Him with creatures or with man's ideas of Him must result in our taking the creature or the idea for God Himself and thus lead to idolatry, which is as much idolatry when concerned with an image in the mind as when centred on a material image external to the mind. And far from making God unreal, the doctrine of His transcendence and "otherness" from all created things, not only preserves us from the error of Pantheism but establishes in the mind a sense of the infinite Majesty of God which is far too often lacking in most people. Deprived, as in modern times, of His unique Being and transcendence God becomes a convenience to man, an accessory to his needs, and the more He is attenuated and reduced to an idea the more He is

ignored and despised. On the other hand, it is precisely from the knowledge that He is not as man, that He is above all the chances and changes of time, "immovable," as St. John says, that He is more than the mind can dream, so that every thought we think, every word we say of Him, is as little like Him as the child's picture of Him as a venerable old man with a beard—it is this which secures the soul in a faith and confidence which nothing can disturb. It is, indeed, extraordinary that anyone should expect to comprehend God, that even Christian people should be heard to say, "But I can't see why God allows this or that," or expect that the Being of God can be made plain to minds which are incapable of understanding the "mysterious universe" in which they live, much less the minds of beings like themselves. Only God can know Himself, and the knowledge of Himself which He reveals to man is sufficient and, indeed, is far greater than most Christians ever assimilate, largely because they are content to remain with a few childish notions all their lives instead of growing up as they are meant to do. It is with this growing up that St. John is concerned and to assist which he would have us see that, good and useful as our early conceptions of God may be, yet if held on to they become a hindrance to our progress in the spiritual life and to union with God.

We have, then, to think of God as above and beyond all our thinking, to rise to that act of faith which sees Him as Supreme Being, "the things of whom knoweth no man" (1 Cor. ii, 11), "whose judgments are unsearchable, and His ways past finding out" (Rom. xi, 33), who "dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen or can see" (1 Tim. vi, 16), and "worship with reverent silence the unutterable Truths, and, with the unfathomable depth and holy veneration of our mind, approach that Mystery of Godhead which exceeds all Mind and Being." "Thus," says Dionysius, "pressing upwards to those beams which in the Holy Scriptures shine upon us . . . we learn that concerning the Godhead, wherewith It hath instructed us in the same Scriptures, that It is the Cause and Origin

and Being and Life of all creation. And It is to them that fall away from It a Voice that doth recall them and a Power by which they rise ; and to them that have stumbled into a corruption of the Divine Image within them, It is a Power of Renewal and Reform ; and a Sacred Grounding to them that feel the shock of unholy assault, and a Security to them which stand : an upward Guidance to them that are being drawn unto It, and a Principle of Illumination to them that are being enlightened : a Principle of Perfection to them that are being perfected ; a Principle of Deity to them that are being deified ; and of Simplicity to them that are being brought into simplicity ; and of Unity to them that are being brought into unity " (Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, I, iii). Each sentence of this passage from that mystical writer who was most responsible for stamping the doctrine of the Incomprehensible God upon the thought of his successors, shows how little that doctrine makes God unreal or, in the ordinary sense, far-off. On the contrary, it contains and leads us to the complementary doctrine of the Immanence of God in all things, whilst at the same time protecting us from the error of making Him a part of things. For it is exactly because God is Transcendent, other than things and not circumscribed by or contained within creatures, that He is in all things, or better, that all things are in Him " in whom we live and move and have our being " (Acts xvii, 28).

" It must be known that God dwells and is present substantially in every soul, even in that of the greatest sinner in the world. And this kind of union ever exists between God and all the creatures, for in it He is preserving their being ; so that if union of this kind were to fail them, they would at once become annihilated and would cease to be " (A. II, v, 3). " The soul has its natural and radical life in God, as have likewise all created things . . . the soul sees that she has her natural life in God, through the being that she has in Him " (S.C. viii, 2).

Commenting on the line " The grove and its beauty " in the *Spiritual Canticle*, St. John explains : " By the grove

is here understood God, together with all the creatures that are in Him ; for even as all the trees and plants have their life and root in the grove, so the creatures, celestial and terrestrial alike, have their root and life in God. This, then, the soul says : that she will show herself there to God inasmuch as He is life and being to all the creatures, knowing that in Him is the beginning and the duration of them and for them " (xxxviii, 8). And in *The Living Flame*, speaking of the effects produced in the soul by the mystic union, after repeating that all creatures have their life and duration in God, he goes on, " and although it is true that the soul is now able to see that these things are *distinct from God*, in that they have a created being, and it sees them in Him, with their force, root, and strength, it knows equally that God in His own Being, is all these things, in an infinite and pre-eminent way, to such a point that it understands them better in His Being than in themselves. . . . God . . . is always moving, ruling and giving being and virtue and grace and gifts to all creatures, containing them all in Himself, virtually, presentially and substantially " (stanza iv, 5, 7). It is to be remembered that St. John is writing as a theologian so that the terms he uses must be understood in the sense of that science. Thus the term " being " means " that which is " and may be used of Uncreated Being, that is God who is the Principle, Source and Reason of all being, or of created beings which are totally dependent on God for all that they are. " Substance " and " substantially " are to be understood in a metaphysical sense, not in a material or physical one, but as the term is used in the Nicene Creed " of one substance with the Father," meaning that the Word of God is of one Nature, Being and Life with the Father, " I and My Father are One," not merely a moral oneness, but an identity of Nature. Or as in the term Transubstantiation, wherein " substance " means that which is of the order of intelligible reality, not the sensible order, for as St. John says, " Substance cannot be communicated to the senses " (S.C. xxxii, 4). In the ordinary, everyday use of the word substance and substantial commonly mean

that which can be perceived by the senses, but in philosophy and theology substance is precisely that which the senses cannot perceive, it can only be known by the intellect. St. John is but following all Catholic theologians in affirming that God is the Sole Creator, "for although God performed many other things by the hand of another, as by angels and men, He never performed the act of creation, neither performs it, save by His own hand" (S.C. iv, 3); that the specific note of the creature is its dependence upon God whose continuous creative activity keeps it in being; that although all things are in God they are yet distinct from Him, "the distance between their being and His Divine Being is infinite" (A. II, viii, 3), and that God contains all things within Himself "virtually, presentially and substantially." It is, indeed, more common to speak of the immanence of God in creatures by His power, presence and essence, as St. Thomas explains that "God is in all things by His Power, inasmuch as all things are subject to His Power; He is in all things by His Presence as all things are bare and open to His sight; He is in all things by His Essence, inasmuch as He is the cause of existence to all things . . . not indeed by the essence of the things themselves, as if He were of their essence; but by His own Essence" (S.T. I, viii, 3). But he guards the expression that God is *in* all things by saying that "although material things are said to be in anything as in that which contains them, nevertheless spiritual things contain those things in which they are; as the soul contains the body. Hence also God is in things as containing them," not as contained or limited by them, "yet by a certain similitude to material things, it is said that all things are in God" (*ibid.*, Art. 1).

Elsewhere St. Thomas says that by presence is meant the Divine operation, by power the Divine action, both of which are contained in the Divine Essence. Or we may think of God as present in all things by His Wisdom by which the ideas or forms of all things eternally present to the Divine Mind are clothed with matter, as St. John says that God not only gave creatures "their being out of nothing, but

SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS

He even endowed them with innumerable graces and virtues, making them beauteous in admirable order and unfailing dependence one upon another and doing all this through His wisdom whereby He created them, which is His Word, His Only-Begotten Son " (S.C. v, 1) : and by His Goodness, " even as He says in Genesis : God saw all the things which He had made, and they were very good. To behold them very good was to make them very good in the Word, His Son " (*ibid.* v, 4) : and by His Power by which He made all things to be where nothing was before creation and sustains all things in existence, keeping them, as St. Augustine says, from relapsing into that nothingness toward which by their created nature they lean.

But in what sense are all things said to be *in* God or, as in St. John's words, that God " is all these things ? " The answer may be found in the fact that in intellectual beings, as are God, angels and man, that which is known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower, i.e. after the particular manner by which each order of intellectual beings knows. To know a thing is to possess that thing, not merely an idea of it, but the reality of it. To know a stone is to possess that stone *not* after the manner in which it exists outside the mind as a material being, but after the mind's manner of knowing, i.e. immaterially and spiritually. Now God's knowledge is not the consequence, as ours is, of the existence of things which God sees and so knows, but His knowledge of things exists before and is the cause of the existence of things, they are because He knows them, has ever known them, as ideas or forms in His eternal Mind. Thus all things are in God, not after their material manner of existence but according to His mode of knowing, to which all things owe their existence. So God is rightly called the Divine Artist since the works of His hands proceed from the ideas of things in His Mind and are impressed with the Being of their Creator who, as we say of human artists, has put Himself into them. And God " is all these things," since as He is the First efficient cause of all, all the being and perfections of all things pre-exist in Him as Supreme and

Self-existent Being who contains within Himself the whole perfection of being. This does not mean that could all the being and perfections of creation be gathered into one single whole that this whole would be God, for all created being and perfection is outside God, who is neither a part of nor a collection of creatures, but as Dionysius says, "He is all things as being the cause of them all and as holding together and anticipating in Himself all the beginnings and all the fulfilments of all things ; and He is above them all, in that He, anterior to their existence, super-essentially transcends them all " (*Divine Names*, v, 8).

2. The relation, then, between God and creatures is one of cause and effect, God alone is Being, Uncreated and Underived, Self-Subsistent, in whom, and this is only true of Him, Essence and Existence and all else that He is is One, Undivided and Indivisible Pure Act, the God who is "I am that I am" as Holy Scripture declares. Creatures are an effect of that Being which God is, their being is created, derived, dependent, divided, temporal, subject to change and decay. God is Necessary Being, creatures are contingent beings who do not exist of necessity but of the free *fiat* of God, who, as the early second century author of the *Shepherd* of Hermas says, "created and finished all things, and brought all things into being out of nothing. He comprehends all, and nothing can comprehend Him." All that creatures are is purely His gift, and this is particularly true of our knowledge of Him, whether it be gained from the contemplation of the works of His hands, or of the mysteries of the Faith which contain His Self Revelation in and through His Word, the latter of which reaches its highest point in this life in the final stage of the soul's progress toward union which consists of "a touch of the Substance of God in the substance of the soul" (*L.F.* II, 19), by which is effected "a total transformation in the Beloved . . . wherein each surrenders himself by total possession, the one to the other in consummate union of love, as far as is possible in this life, wherein the soul is made Divine and becomes God by participation, in so far as may be in this life, and thus this

is the loftiest estate which in this life may be attained " (S.C. xxvii, 2).

God is Light (*A.* I, iv, 2, cf. *Jas.* i, 17, 1 *John* i, 5), infinite Beauty (*ibid.* I, iv, 4) and Goodness, "for there is naught good, save only God" (*ibid.* I, iv, 4), infinite Wisdom (*ibid.* I, iv, 5), Divine Majesty (*ibid.* I, v, 3), the Creator (*ibid.* I, vi, 1), Uncreated Spirit (*ibid.* I, vi, 3), the Chief Beginning (*ibid.* II, xxvi, 5) and Final End of man (*ibid.* II, ii, 1), Three in One (*ibid.* II, ix, 1; II, xxvii, 1; *L.F.* II, 1), Darkness to our understanding (*A.* II, ix, 1), who is "above the heavens and speaks after the ways of eternity . . . and does naught without cause and in truth" (*ibid.* II, xx, 5, 6), who "in His governance of man has laid down rational and natural limits" (*ibid.* II, xxi, 1), giving "to each one after his own manner. For God is like a spring, whence every one draws water according to the vessel which he carries" (*ibid.* II, xxi, 2), acts "according to His Providence and Justice" (*ibid.* II, xxi, 9), has spoken once for all through His Son (*ibid.* II, xxii, 3), "desires that the government and direction of every man should be undertaken by another man bearing His image, and that man should be ruled and governed by natural reason" (*ibid.* II, xxii, 9), that no one should trust in his own experiences "apart from the Church or her ministers" (*ibid.* II, xxii, 11), "ordinarily neither works nor reveals anything that can be accomplished by human counsel and industry," willing "that men should make such use of their own reason as is possible, all things having to be governed by reason, save those that are of faith, which transcend all judgment and reason, although these are not contrary to faith" (*ibid.* II, xxii, 13), sometimes causes the soul "to understand naked truths" by an "intuition . . . conveyed to the intellect," which consists in "comprehending and seeing with the intellect the truths of God," which "kind of knowledge comes to the soul in direct relation to God," giving it "after a most lofty manner, a perception of some attribute of God, of His omnipotence, of His might, of His goodness and sweetness, etc." (*ibid.* II, xxvi, 1, 2), "grants various revelations to whom He will"

(A. II, xxviii, 2), "destroys not nature but perfects it" (*ibid.* III, ii, 7), "loves moral good" (*ibid.* III, xxviii, 3), "bestows gifts and graces upon men for the benefit of others, such as are called *gratis datae*" (*ibid.* III, xxx, 1), works miracles by men, although never "save when they are really necessary for belief" (*ibid.* III, xxxi, 8), "moves the will to devotion by various external means" (*ibid.* III, xlii), desires that prayer should be "the seeking and asking of that which is most pleasing to Him" not to ourselves (*ibid.* III, xliv), "deals with each soul according to its capacity and state" (*ibid.* II, xi, 9; II, xvii, 3-5, 8; D.N. i, 1; L.F. iii, 30).

Leaving the further teaching of St. John upon God's action in and upon the soul for the moment, we may note how He adheres to the Scriptural manner of speaking of God, as is indeed necessary, in terms which, true so far as they go, are yet capable of misunderstanding if taken literally instead of analogically and symbolically. Thus he speaks of the hand, the touch, the voice, the wrath of God, not implying that God has a body, or that in Himself there is any change of disposition toward His creatures, but that His acts have a similar, but spiritual effect in the soul, which may overflow into the body, as is exercised upon the body by the human senses. This will be dealt with in chap. xiv upon the spiritual senses. So also when he speaks of the love or the wrath of God, no change must be thought of in God Himself, who changes not (Mal. iii, 6; Jas. i, 17), but only as in the creature who, in turning away from God by sin, departs from the love of God so that He can only treat it as it is in its rejection of Him. Thus what we term God's punishment of sin is in reality the effect of the sin in ourselves, as St. John says, "this is to know the punishment in the cause, which is as much as to say that such sins must be the cause of such punishments, at the hand of God who is most just. And as the Divine Wisdom says: *Per quæ quis peccat, per hæc et torquetur* (Wis. xi, 16). With respect to that and for that "wherein a man sins, therein is he punished" (A. II, xxi, 9). And this is so because God deals with man as He has made him, a free creature, and will not compel

his choice. God's love for man is unchangeable, is as true for man in his sin as when he is in a state of grace (Rom. v, 8), and is the cause of our love for Him (1 John iv, 19), and the root of our repentance by which, turning toward Him we find that He is that same love which, though we forsook it, did not forsake us.

From what, then, we know of God, either by reason or faith, three conclusions necessarily follow, and these form the basis of all the earlier part of St. John's teaching in *The Ascent* and *The Dark Night*.

1. That there is nothing in heaven or earth which can in any way be equal to or comparable with God. "For all things of earth and heaven, compared with God, are nothing, as Jeremiah says in these words : *Aspexi terram et ecce vacua erat et nihil ; et cœlos, et non erat lux in eis*. I beheld the earth, he says, and it was void, and it was nothing ; and the heavens, and saw that they had no light. In saying that he beheld the earth void, he means that all its creatures were nothing, and that the earth was nothing likewise. And, in saying that he beheld the heavens and saw no light in them, he says that all the luminaries of heaven, *compared with God*, are pure darkness. So that *in this way*, all the creatures are nothing" (A. I, iv, 3). The words italicized must be noted carefully or the reader may be guilty of accusing St. John of an exaggeration which deprives creatures of that reality and greatness which they possess, a fact St. John would be the first to confess (*vide S.C.* stanzas iv and v). The nothingness he ascribes to creatures is in comparison with God who *is* Being in itself, whilst creatures owe all their being to Him and are utterly dependent upon Him for their continuance in existence. He repeats this, in this fourth chapter alone, no less than seven times, as he passes in review "all the being of creation, then, compared with the Infinite Being of God, is nothing . . . all the beauty of creatures, compared with the infinite beauty of God, is the height of deformity" (i.e. ugliness, the lack of that which makes for beauty), "all the goodness of creatures of the world, in comparison with the infinite goodness of God, may

be described as wickedness." Not that it is wickedness, but in comparison may be "described" as such. "All the wisdom of the world and human ability, compared with the infinite wisdom of God, are pure and supreme ignorance, even as St. Paul writes *ad Corinthos*, saying *Sapientia hujus mundi stultitia est apud Deum*. The wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God. . . . And all the delights and pleasures of the will in all the things of the world, in comparison with all those delights which are God, are supreme affliction, torment and bitterness . . . all the wealth and glory of the creatures in comparison with the wealth which is God, is supreme poverty and wretchedness" (*A. I*, iv).

Read in the sense St. John intends, none of the above detracts from the beauty of creatures, the high wisdom and goodness to be found in men, the delight and pleasure caused by things in the world or the wealth and glory, in variety and splendour of the created universe. Rather, it is all this that we are meant to think of, seeing how great, wonderful and beautiful are God's works, so that at times it seems that nothing could surpass them. Then is it that the full meaning of St. John's "compared with God" comes with force—if the things of earth be so great, how much greater is God, if earth's beauty be so enthralling, its wisdom so deep, what must be the First Beauty of whom all this is but the faintest impress, the "depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (*Rom. xi*, 33).

2. As we consider "how great is the distance there is between all that the creatures are in themselves and that which God is in Himself" (*A. I*, v, 1), it becomes more and more evident that none of these things can be a proximate or direct means of bringing the soul into union with God, since "there is none that comes near to God, or bears any resemblance to His Being . . . it is true that all creatures have a certain relation to God, and bear a Divine impress" so that they do form remote or indirect means, a ladder of creatures by which we may ascend toward God, as St. Robert Bellarmine says, and St. John shows in *The Spiritual Canticle*, but since there is "no essential resemblance or

connection between them and God . . . it is impossible for the mind to attain to God by means of the creatures, celestial or earthly, inasmuch as there is no proportion of likeness between them" and God (A. II, viii, 3). For "according to a rule of philosophy, all means must be proportioned to their end: that is to say that they must have some connection and resemblance with the end such as is enough and sufficient that the desired end may be attained through them" (*ibid.* 2). The way to God by the means of creatures is like a bridge of which the piers fail to reach the farther side, or a ladder which is too short for the purpose required, or as in the examples St. John gives, they are a road which, however far it may go, does not connect with the city sought for, and just as there is no other means of uniting wood with fire than that of heat, so "in order that the intellect may be united to God in this life, so far as is possible, it must of necessity employ that means that unites it to Him and that bears the greatest resemblance to Him." Now this is true not only of creatures in general, but of all those creaturely ideas which are formed in the mind and imagination, and which, however high and spiritual they may be, cannot be a proximate means of union with God. For all the notions and ideas which the mind and imagination forms of God and spiritual realities are not derived from those spiritual things themselves but from things known to the mind by the experience of the senses, that is, from creatures of whose nature they partake more than of the nature of the spiritual realities which they but faintly and inadequately represent, much less give the substance of. "All the imagination can imagine and the intellect can receive and understand in this life is not nor can be, a proximate means of union with God. For if we speak naturally, since the intellect can understand nothing save that which is contained within, and this under the forms and images of things that are received through the bodily senses, the which things, we have said, cannot serve as means, it can make no use of natural intelligence. And if we speak of the supernatural (in so far

as is possible in this life of our ordinary faculties) the intellect in its bodily prison has neither disposition nor capacity for receiving the clear knowledge of God ; for such knowledge belongs not to this state, and we must either die or remain without receiving it. . . . Wherefore no supernatural apprehension or knowledge in this mortal state can serve as a proximate means to the high union of love with God " (A. II, viii, 4).

We must be careful to note that in the above and similar passages the Saint is not speaking of any knowledge or any union with God, but of that " clear knowledge " of and that " mystic union " with God in this life the way to and the manner of which he is concerned with.

3. That union is one of lover and Beloved, of the soul filled and consumed by Divine Charity, that is, with God Himself, and before this can begin to come to pass, so infinite is the distance between God and the soul, every affection for creatures in themselves must be surrendered and God loved for naught but Himself alone. For " when the soul is clothed in these affections, it has no capacity for being enlightened and possessed by the pure and simple light of God if it cast them not first from it," the reason of this being that " two contraries cannot co-exist in one person ; and that darkness which is affection for creatures, and light, which is God, are contrary to each other " (A. I, iv, 1-2). Further, the soul tends to become that which it desires and loves so that the " affection and feeling which it has for creatures renders it like to them . . . and thus he that loves a creature becomes as low as is that creature, and, in some ways, lower : for love not only makes the lover equal to the object of his love, but even subjects him to it." Since, then, as has been seen, creatures compared with God are nothing, affection for and attachment to them causes the soul to be " likewise nothing in the eyes of God, and less than nothing," and renders it incapable of union with Him, for " that which is not can have no agreement with that which is," and " the soul that loves anything else (' apart from God,' add the editions, to make the meaning clear)

becomes incapable of pure union with God and transformation in Him " (*ibid.* I, iv, 3-4). " Thus he that will love some other thing together with God of a certainty makes little account of God, for he weighs in the balance against God that which . . . is far distant from God " (*ibid.* I, v, 4). The sense here is that of our Lord's words: " Ye cannot serve God and mammon," and, " No man can serve two masters," and the command to love God with all our mind and heart and strength, of which last St. John says, " Herein is contained all that the spiritual man ought to do, and all that I have here to teach him " (*ibid.* III, xvi, 1), for " inasmuch as there is naught that equals God, the soul that loves some other thing together with Him, or clings to it, wrongs Him greatly. And if this is so, what would it be doing if it loved anything more than God? " (*ibid.* I, v, 5).

" God is love," is, not becomes love in relation to creatures, but in His eternal relation to Himself, knowing and loving Himself in His Son, in whom He saw and by whom He created all things (*S.C.*, first edit., v, 4), and He " loves nothing apart from Himself nor loves anything in a lowlier way than He loves Himself, for He loves all things in relation to Himself, and love is the final reason " (for the existence of all things) (*S.C.*, first edit. xxiii, 5).

OF all the curious mistakes and misconceptions that have risen about St. John's teaching, none is less excusable than that which suggests that it is insufficiently Christian in that it seems, at least, to remove our Lord from that central place which He rightly holds in Christian faith and practice. The truth is, on the contrary, that few, if any, writers upon the mystic union give so much space to or state so emphatically the unique dignity of the Person of the Eternal Word, the need the soul has of ever meditating upon and following His example, and the truth that "no man cometh to the Father" but by Him who is the Way even unto that end of which the Saint writes, and in the consummation of which he says the soul passes on "to a union of its intellect and to a knowledge of the high mysteries of the Incarnation, which is the soul's highest and most delectable wisdom," for which all other things such as "exterior and interior suffering" and many favours of God both to the intellect and the senses, and the performance of many spiritual exercises are "inferior to and preparations for coming to the lofty caverns of the mysteries of Christ, which is the loftiest wisdom attainable in this life" (S.C. xxxvi, 1-3).

One reason, doubtless, for the misconception to which we have referred, is that St. John is too careful and experienced a theologian to mistake our Lord, who is the Way, for the End, which is God who is the Trinity. The Church, unlike much popular Christianity, ever keeps this distinction in mind; her worship and prayer are addressed to God through our Lord and in union with Him, whose mystical body she is; in the Mass that worship is directed not to our Lord's Sacramental presence but to the Holy Trinity to whom that sacrifice is offered. This is not to say that Divine worship is not due to our Lord present either upon the altar or in the tabernacle, but only that Mass, the Church's supreme act

of worship, is not intended for that purpose, it is our Lord's own worship of the Trinity in which the members of His body are privileged to participate and make their own. A striking phrase in the Christmas Preface illustrates the mind of the Church in this matter, *Quia per incarnati verbi mysterium, nova mentis nostrae oculis lux tuæ claritatis infulsit; ut dum visibiliter Deum cognoscimus, per hunc in invisibilium amorem rapiamur*. Because by the mystery of the Incarnate Word the new light of Thy glory hath shone upon the eyes of our mind; that while we visibly recognize God we may be rapt up by Him to the love of things invisible, that is to the invisible Trinity whom it is the purpose of the Incarnation to make known to man, "I have declared unto them Thy Name and will declare it" (John xvii, 26).

Let us listen, then, to St. John, as he speaks in lyrical, though sober theological terms of the Word, the Son of God, to whom the enamoured soul cries in the first stanza of *The Spiritual Canticle*:

Wherefore hast Thou hidden Thyself
And hast left me, O Beloved, to my sighing,

"wherein she begs the manifestation of His Divine Essence; for the place where the Son of God is hidden is, as St. John says, the bosom of the Father (John i, 18), which is the Divine Essence . . . which same thing was meant by the Bride in the Divine Canticles when, desiring the union and fellowship of the Divinity of the Word her Spouse, she begged the Father for it, saying: *Indica mihi ubi pascas, ubi cubes in meridie* (S.C. i, 26). Which is to say: Show me where thou feedest, and where thou dost rest at noonday. For to inquire of Him where He fed was to beg that she might be shown the Essence of the Divine Word, for the Father neither glories in nor feeds upon anything, save the Word, His only Son . . . nor rests not, neither is in any other place, save in His Son, in whom He rests, communicating to Him all His Essence—at noonday—which is in eternity, wherein He ever begets Him" (S.C. i. 2, 3).

THE WORD, THE WAY AND THE LIFE

The Word "is the loftiest essential Wisdom of God" (S.C. xxxv, 4), which the soul in the high estate of the Spiritual Marriage desiring to know, cries

Then shall we go
To the high caverns of the rock,
Well hidden are they,
And there entering in
Taste of the new wine of the pomegranates.

The rock is Christ, as says the Apostle, and "the high caverns are the lofty and high and profound mysteries in the wisdom of God which are in Christ, concerning the hypostatic union of human nature with the Divine Word." So well hidden are these caverns that "despite all the mysteries and wonders that have been discovered by holy doctors, and understood by holy souls in this estate of life, there has remained much more to be said, and even to be understood, and so much more to be fathomed in Christ," in whom the Apostle says, "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." And "the pomegranates signify the Divine mysteries of Christ" (S.C. xxxvi, 2-6), the Wisdom of God whereby He created all things, "which is the Word, His Only-Begotten Son; seeing them in this image of His Son alone, which was to give them their natural being, to communicate to them many natural gifts and graces and to make them perfect and finished . . . and also in this image of His Son alone He left them clothed with beauty, communicating to them supernatural being. This was when He became man, exalting man in the beauty of God, and consequently exalted all the creatures in him, since in uniting Himself with man He united Himself with the nature of them all" (S.C. v, 1-4).

This last sentence may require a little explanation. By the possession of his intellect, man is able to possess all things in the act of knowing them, since knowledge is a possession of anything after the manner of the knower, so that, as says St. Thomas, "To possess a thing not materially but formally, which is the definition of knowledge, is the noblest manner of having or possessing it" (*In causis*, i, 18);

because, amongst other reasons, a thing so possessed is not destroyed. For instance, if I pick a flower to possess it, by that physical act, common to the animal, I destroy it, but this is not so when I apprehend it with and in my intellect and possess it, not simply the idea of it, after an intellectual manner. But further, in this intellectual act by which man is capable of possessing all things of the created universe, he raises them above their common order, causing them to exist in a much nobler and permanent way. Thus when by the Incarnation human nature is raised to a certain union with the Divine, all creatures are established in a new relation to God through that intellectual relation they are brought into by man's knowledge of them. There would seem to be a suggestion of this in St. Paul's "The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. viii, 19-21).

From these quotations which speak of the revelations made to the soul in the state of the Spiritual Betrothal, and which we have begun with as especially concerned with our Lord as the Eternal Word, we may now review that large body of teaching in which St. John sees our Lord as the Way, the Truth and the Life of the whole journey of the soul toward union with God. "For progress comes not save through the imitation of Christ, Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and no man comes to the Father but by Him, even as He Himself says through St. John. And elsewhere He says: 'I am the Door: by Me if any man enter in he shall be saved.' Wherefore, all spirituality that would walk in sweetness and ease, and flees from the imitation of Christ, is nothing worth. And, as I have said that Christ is the Way, and that this Way is to die to our nature, both in sense and in spirit, I will now explain how this may be after the example of Christ, for He is our Example and Light" (A. II, vii, 8, 9). He goes on to show how by His

life of poverty, our Lord died spiritually to the things of sense, and how in His death upon the cross He was "likewise annihilated in His soul, without any relief and consolation, since His Father left Him in the most intense aridity, according to the lower part of His nature." The last words instance how careful St. John is to preserve theological accuracy, for although our Lord so suffered in the lower part of His nature, His human soul ever enjoyed the sight of the Beatific Vision by virtue of its union with the Word. But it was by that dereliction which forced the *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani* from His lips that "He wrought the greatest work that He had ever done . . . which was the reconciliation and union of mankind, through grace, with God." This is "the mystery of the gate and of the way of Christ," whom, St. John laments, "is known very little by those who consider themselves His friends," those who "seeking their own pleasures and consolations in Him because of their great love of themselves, but not loving His bitter trials and death because of their great love for Him" (A. II, vii, 10-12).

In chap. xiii of the first book of *The Ascent* the Saint gives directions as to how the soul is to actively enter into the dark night of the senses and desires, directions "as profitable and efficacious as they are concise; so that anyone who sincerely desires to practise them will need no others, but will find them all included in these. First, let him have an habitual desire to imitate Christ in all that he does, conforming himself to His life; upon which life he must meditate so that he may know how to imitate it, and to behave in all things as Christ would behave. Secondly, in order that he may do this well, every pleasure that presents itself to the senses, if it be not purely for the honour and glory of God, must be completely renounced and rejected for the love of Jesus Christ, Who in this life had no other pleasure, nor desired such, than to do the will of His Father, which He called His meat and food."

The admirable simplicity of these directions which contain all that is necessary for the treading of the ascetic or

purgative way of the Christian life is emphasized in a later chapter in which the Saint comments on our Lord's words : " How strait is the gate and how narrow the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it," and on that " admirable teaching in the eighth chapter of St. Mark," of which he says that, the more necessary it is for spiritual persons, the less it is practised by them. He is especially referring to the words : " If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it ; but he that loses his life for My sake shall find it," and interpreting this in " its real and spiritual sense " he shows how different is the way spiritual persons " should conduct themselves upon this road from that which many of them think sufficient. For they believe that any kind of retirement and reformation in things suffices ; and others content themselves with practising the virtues and continuing in prayer and pursuing mortification ; but attain not to detachment and poverty or denial or spiritual purity (which are all one), which our Lord here commends to us " (A. II, vii, 5).

This whole chapter enforces the lesson St. John is constantly teaching that however necessary, good and useful various practices are, especially for beginners, all are useless to him who would come to that union with God in this life with which the Saint is concerned, the way to which is in that imitation of Christ " which consists only in the one thing needful, which is to know how to deny oneself truly, according to the exterior and interior, giving oneself up to suffering for Christ, and to annihilate oneself in all things " (*ibid.* II, vii, 8).

In these days when not only modern cults like that of Christian science but many professing Christian teachers impugn the absolute validity and finality of the revelation made by Jesus Christ, St. John's answer to the question, " why it is no longer lawful, under the law of grace, to ask anything of God by supernatural means, as it was under the ancient law," is most valuable in itself as well as illus-

trating the supreme place our Lord held in the Saint's teaching. It was fitting, he says, that under the old dispensation, "priests and prophets should seek visions and revelations of God, because at that time faith had no sure foundation, neither was the evangelical law established," so that it was lawful to inquire of God in various ways, and that He should answer by means of visions, revelations, etc., in all of which things belonging to or leading to "the mysteries of our faith" were made known. "But now that the faith is founded in Christ and in this era of grace the evangelical law has been made manifest, there is no reason to inquire of Him in that manner, nor for Him to speak or to answer as He did then. For, in giving us, as He did, His Son, who is His Word, and He has no other, He spake to us altogether, once and for all, in this single Word, and He has no more to say." For as St. Paul has said, "God who at sundry times and divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son" (Heb. i, 1). "Herein the Apostle declares that God has been, as it were, dumb, and has no more to say, since that which He spake aforetime and in part to the prophets, He has now spoken altogether in Him, giving us the All, which is His Son . . . wherefore he who would desire any vision or revelation now, would not only be acting foolishly, but would be committing an offence against God, by not setting his eyes altogether upon Christ, not desiring any other or new thing. For God might answer him after this manner, saying: If I have spoken all things to thee in My word, which is My Son, and I have no other, what answer can I now make to thee, or what can I reveal to thee which is greater than this? Set thine eyes on Him alone, for in Him I have spoken and revealed to thee all things, and in Him thou shalt find yet more than that which thou askest or desirest . . . for He is all My word and answer, and He is all My vision and all My revelation; so that I have spoken to thee, answered thee, declared to thee and revealed to thee, in giving Him to thee as thy brother, companion and master, as ransom

and reward. . . . Hear Him ; for I have no more faith to reveal, neither any more things to declare." Thus, St. John concludes, after a long exposition upon this finality and completeness of the revelation of God in Christ, " we must now be guided in all things by the law of Christ made man, and by that of His Church, and of His ministers, in a human and visible manner, and by these means we must remedy our spiritual weaknesses and ignorances, since in these means we shall find abundant medicine for them all " (*A. II*, xxii, 3-7). Thus far St. John has shown our Lord as the Way by which the soul sets out to free itself from the tyranny of the sense and desires ; the Model to be kept constantly before the eyes ; the one Divine Teacher in whom all the revelation of God is to be found ; the All of God manifested to man, so far as this is possible and necessary in this life, in human form ; our Brother, Companion and Master ; the Ransom of our reconciliation and redemption, and the Reward of our eternity. Toward the end of *The Dark Night*, in treating of the ten degrees of love according to St. Bernard and St. Thomas, he tells of the delectable visits of " His Majesty " to the soul which has attained to the fourth degree in which " the boundless love of Christ, the Word, cannot suffer the afflictions of His lover without succouring him," and " oftentimes and quite habitually grants " joy to the soul (*D.N. II*, xix, 4). But it is in *The Spiritual Canticle* and *The Living Flame of Love* that, as we have seen, St. John draws out the fulness of the relations of the Son to the Father and the Holy Spirit in the interior life of the Blessed Trinity, and the manner and effects of that union with the Triune God which is accomplished when the soul no longer lives of itself but " in Christ " who is its life. " Beside this outline of faith there is another outline of love in the soul of the lover, and this is according to the will " (the outline of faith being according to the understanding), " wherein the image of the Beloved is outlined in such manner, and so completely and vividly pictured, when there is union of love, that it is true to say that the Beloved lives in the lover, and the lover in the Beloved : and such manner of

likeness does love make in the transformation of the two that are in love that it may be said that each is the other and that both are one. The reason for this is that in the union and transformation of love the one gives possession of itself to the other, and each one gives and abandons itself to the other and exchanges itself for the other ; so that each lives in the other, and the one is the other, and both are one through the transformation of love. It is this that St. Paul meant when he said : *Vivo autem, jam no ego, vivit vero in me Christus*, which is to say, ' I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' For in saying ' I live, yet not I,' he meant that, although he lived, his life was not his own, because he was transformed in Christ and his life was Divine rather than human " (S.C. xi, 6).

Startling and unfamiliar as such teaching may appear to the modern reader, so often accustomed to think of the Christian life under the categories and terms of a decadent religiosity, we do well to remind ourselves that it is derived, not merely from St. Paul, but from Jesus Christ Himself, as a reading of the fifteenth and seventeenth chapters of the Fourth Gospel will show. St. John is but following the New Testament and Catholic conception of what constitutes the essence of the Christian life, that is, not simply an imitation of Christ but an identification with Christ, a being made one with and in Him, so that all differences save those of nature which exist between the soul and Christ are swept away in the union of charity. " Save of nature," we say, for here is no confusion or loss of identity or individuality, the union is not one of absorption as in Pantheism and Buddhism, if indeed it be so in the latter, which is not certain. St. John is quite clear upon this. The soul, he says, " seems to be God rather than a soul, and is indeed God by participation : although it is true that its natural being, though thus transformed, is as distinct from the Being of God as it was before, even as the window has likewise a nature distinct from that of the ray of the sun which illumines and transforms it so that it will itself seem to be a ray and will give the same light as the ray "

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(A. II, v, 6, 7). The clear and immediate vision of God in heaven "is the cause of the perfect likeness of the soul to God, for, as St. John says, we know that we shall be like Him. Not because the soul will come to have the capacity of God, for that is impossible" (*D.N.* II, xx, 5). And speaking of the Spiritual Marriage, the Saint says that in it there "is effected such union of the two natures, and such communication of the Divine nature to the human that, while neither of them changes its being, each of them appears to be God" (*S.C.* xxvii, 3).

Beyond these formal statements we have the Saint's insistence upon the complete and essential difference which exists between God and the creature of which, as it has been considered already in chap. v, one quotation will suffice here, "God is of another being than His creatures in that He is at an infinite distance from them all" (*A.* III, xii, 2). Thus close and intimate as is the union of the soul with God even in heaven the former remains in all its natural distinction from God, preserves its individuality, is that person God created and has raised to Himself in the most perfect union of mind and will, desire and love, deifying it, as the Father's say, yet without depriving it of its essentially creaturely, as opposed to the uncreated nature of God Himself. Returning from this digression, which seemed to be necessary to avoid misconception as to St. John's teaching, to what he has to say about our Lord's relation to the soul in the high estate of the Spiritual Marriage, we come to the words of the Spouse in stanza xxviii :

Beneath the apple-tree
There wert thou betrothed to Me ;
There gave I thee My hand
And thou wert redeemed
Where thy mother had been corrupted.

Herein the Spouse, our Lord, communicates to the soul His bride, "sweet mysteries concerning His Incarnation, and the way and manner of human redemption, which is one of the highest works of God . . . telling her how by

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means of the Tree of the Cross she was betrothed to Him ; how He gave her therein the favour of His mercy, being pleased to die for her and making her beauteous after this manner. For He restored and redeemed her by the same means whereby human nature had been ruined, namely, by means of the Tree of Paradise, in our first mother, Eve." The apple tree is the Tree of the Cross upon which human nature was redeemed and the Son of God betrothed Himself to every soul " giving it for this purpose pledges and grace through the merits of His Passion . . . so that, if thy mother caused thy death beneath the Tree, I gave thee life beneath the Tree of the Cross."

In a later stanza (xxxv) the Bride cries

Rejoice we, beloved, and
Let us go to see ourselves in thy beauty
In the mountain or the hill,

desiring " that she may become like to the Beloved " and by the exercise of love may be like to Him in beauty, of which the Saint says, " This is the adoption of the sons of God, who will truly say to Him that which the Son Himself said through St. John to the Eternal Father in these words : *Omnia mea tua sunt et tua mea sunt*. Which is to say, Father, all My things are Thine and Thy things are Mine. He, by essence, being the Son by nature ; we, by participation, being sons by adoption. And thus He spake, not only for Himself, who is the Head, but for His whole Mystical Body, which is the Church."

The mountain stands for what theologians name " morning knowledge," an Augustinian term for the Angels' knowledge of things as they existed before creation in the Word of God, " by whom all things were made " according to the eternal ideas in the Divine Mind, for " the Word," says St. John, " is the loftiest essential Wisdom of God." And the hill is that " evening knowledge " of the existence of things created, as they stand in their own nature ; because the existence of things flows from the Word, as from

a kind of first principle. (*Vide Coll. i, 15-17* ; St. Aug. *Gen. ad lit.* ii-iv, and St. Thomas, *Sum. Theol.* I, LVIII, vi.)

“ When the soul, then, says : Let us go to the mountains to see ourselves in Thy beauty, she means : Make me like to the beauty of Divine Wisdom and inform me therewith ; which Wisdom, as we say, is the Son of God. And when she says : or let us go to the hill, she is praying to be informed likewise by His Wisdom and His mysteries in His creatures and works, which also is beauty wherein the soul desires to see herself enlightened.”

Of the following stanza which speaks of the “lofty caverns of the rock,” we have spoken at the beginning of this chapter. From stanza xxxviii of *The Spiritual Cantic* to the end of this work and throughout *The Living Flame of Love*, in which is expressed the growing delight of the soul possessed and inhabited by the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, St. John more particularly emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit, the one outstanding reference to our Lord being in stanza ii of the latter work in which “the soul explains how the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are They that affect within it this Divine work of union. The stanza runs,

Oh, Sweet burn ! Oh, delectable wound !
Oh ! soft hand ! Oh, delicate touch
That savours of eternal life and pays every debt !
In slaying, thou hast changed death into life.

Because it is the whole Trinity which now dwells and operates in the soul “the ‘hand,’ the ‘burn’ and the ‘touch’ are in substance one and the same thing ; and the soul gives them these names, inasmuch as they describe the effect which is caused by each. The ‘burn’ is the Holy Spirit, the ‘hand’ is the Father, and the ‘touch’ is the Son.” For the blessings thus conveyed to it the soul praises God, the second blessing being “the desire for eternal life, which it attributes to the Son, and therefore calls it a delicate touch.” Of this St. John writes in one of his most beautiful passages, “Thou has wounded me, Oh, Hand Divine, in

order to heal me, and Thou hast slain in me that which would have slain me, but for the life of God wherein now I see that I live. And this Thou didst with the liberality of Thy habitual grace, through the touch wherewith Thou didst touch me—namely, the splendour of Thy glory and the image of Thy substance, which is Thy Only Begotten Son ; in whom, since He is Thy Wisdom, Thou reachest from one end to another mightily through His purity. Oh, delicate touch, Thou Word, Son of God, who, through the delicateness of Thy Divine Being, dost subtly penetrate the substance of my soul, and, touching it wholly and delicately, dost absorb it wholly in Thyself in Divine ways of sweetness which have never been heard of in the land of Canaan, nor seen in Teman.”

Such a passage is sufficient to indicate that there burnt in the heart of St. John a no less loving devotion to our Lord than in that of a St. Bernard or St. Francis of Assisi. No one confesses more humbly that all that he has received has come by Jesus Christ, “Thou wilt not take from me my God, that which once Thou gavest me in Thine only Son Jesus Christ, in Whom Thou gavest me all that I desire. . . . Mine are the heavens and mine is the earth ; mine are the people, the righteous and the sinners ; the Angels are mine and the Mother of God, and all things are mine ; and God Himself is mine and for me, for Christ is mine and all for me ” (a Prayer of the soul inflamed with love).

“If in Thy love, O Good Jesus, Thou softenest not the soul, it will persist for ever in its natural hardness ” (*Maxim.* 28). “Let Christ crucified be sufficient for thee and with Him do thou suffer and rest ” (*Points of Love*, 13). “Be thou a lover of the Passion of Christ ” (*ibid.* 16). “One word spake the Father, which Word is His Son, and this Word He speaks ever in eternal silence, and in silence must it be heard by the soul ” (*ibid.* 21). A favourite beginning of his letters was “Jesus be in your soul,” and to Mother Ana de San Alberto, he writes, “If you would communicate your trials to me, go to that spotless mirror of the Eternal Father, which is His Son, for in that mirror I behold

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your soul daily" (letter 11). His poems, too, upon the Incarnation, though inferior in style to those commented upon in his writings, reveal the direction of his mind, set as it was daily at his Mass, upon the Mystery of God made Man giving Himself for man and to man, in the Sacrifice of the Eucharist.

THE whole of St. John's works are concerned with one question, the relation between God and the rational creature who gives himself to the seeking of that perfect union with the Creator which is possible in this life. It follows that his account of this relation, from its initiation by God to its final consummation in the Spiritual Marriage can only be rightly understood in the light of a knowledge of the Being of God and that of the rational creature, man. The first has already been dealt with in previous chapters, we must now proceed to consider the teaching of the Mystical Doctor upon the nature of man. For as he says, following St. Thomas, "God moves all things according to their nature . . . for God to move the soul and raise it up from the extreme depth of its lowliness to the extreme height of His loftiness, in Divine union with Him, He must do it with order and sweetness" (Wis. viii, 1), "and according to the nature of the soul itself" (A. II, xvii, 2-3). Furthermore, the Saint's teaching as to the necessity of a complete detachment both from the things of sense and of spirit, natural and supernatural, can only be appreciated when the nature and activity of the soul and its faculties, together with its union with the body, are seen in the context of the Christian philosophy to which St. John adheres, the foundation and framework of which gives his writing a definiteness and clarity which places him at the head of all those who have written upon the Mystic way. Between God and man there is at once a distinction of an absolute quality or kind, and a likeness, not of God to man but of man to God. Of the distinction St. John says that "God is of another Being than His creatures" (A. III, xii, 2), and that even in the highest union of the soul with Him, "its natural being, though thus transformed, is as distinct from the Being of God as it was before" (*ibid.* II, v, 7). This distinction is rooted in the fact that God *is* Being, man *has* being. God is

Uncreated, Self-Subsistent, Underived, Infinite and Eternal Being, man has a created, dependent, finite and immortal, but not eternal being, all of which is given to him by God and depends for its subsistence upon Him. Of the likeness the Saint teaches that "all creatures have a certain relation to God, and bear a Divine impress, some more and some less, according to what is more or less dominant in their nature" (A. II, viii, 3). Now what is most dominant in man according to his nature is his intellect and will and it is in his intellect that is to be found that image of God in which he was created.

But it is necessary to note also the fact that both the distinction and the likeness have been affected by sin. The natural gulf between the Uncreated Being of God and the created being of man does not of itself form an impassable barrier between the Creator and the creature. For the soul "in its natural being is as perfect as when God created it,¹ yet in its rational being, it is vile, abominable, foul, black and full of evils" by reason of "its inordinate desires for the things of this world" (A. I, ix, 3), which desires have so blinded and darkened the mind that it can no longer receive the Divine image, "as a mirror that is clouded over cannot receive within itself a clear image" so that "neither the sun of natural reason nor that of the supernatural Wisdom of God (can) shine upon it and illumine it clearly . . . and at this time when the soul is darkened in the intellect it is weakened also in the will, and the memory becomes dull and disordered in its due operation" (*ibid.*

¹ This statement calls for exact elucidation in face of the widespread belief, derived from Luther's teaching, that the primal sin corrupted human nature to such an extent that it could not be repaired but only covered up by the grace of Christ. But what was lost at the Fall, as a consequence of man's choosing to be independent of God, was not his natural good, that which was rightly his by virtue of his being man, but that additional good of supernatural justice or righteousness which, since it was not his by natural right, could be lost. Thus sin did not destroy his natural good but only diminished and weakened it, "the first good of human nature is neither taken away nor destroyed by sin" (S.T. II, ii, lxxxv, 1). Naturally, the essence of human nature is always good, to destroy its natural good would be to destroy man; supernaturally, its good has been lost and can only be restored by God, so that the good of our nature may be perfected and brought to its destined end.

I, viii, 1). Moreover, although according to its nature the soul is not, as in Plato's thought, a prisoner within the body, yet "on account of original sin, is truly, as a captive in this mortal body, subject to the passions and desires of nature" (*ibid.* I, xv, 1) and to that affection for creatures which, since "it renders the soul like to creatures—and the greater its affection, the closer is the likeness and equality between them, for love creates a likeness between that which loves and that which is loved"—causes it to become "incapable of pure union with God and transformation in Him" (*ibid.* I, iv, 3).

The distinction between God and man is, then, more than one of nature, a positive barrier to union with God has been set up on man's side who, immersed in the darkness of sin, can have no part with that light which God is, "for light cannot agree with darkness; since, as St. John says, *Tenebræ eam non comprehenderunt*" (*ibid.* I, iv, 1). And the likeness has been disfigured and well-nigh obliterated, though not totally so or beyond restoration, as Luther taught, by the fact that "he that loves a creature becomes as low as is that creature, and, in some ways, lower; for love not only makes the lover equal to the object of his love, but even subjects him to it" (*ibid.* I, iv, 3). The soul absorbed in love of earthly beauty is deformed, says St. John, "ravished by the graces and beauties of the creatures has only supreme misery and unattractiveness in the sight of God, . . . setting its heart upon the good things of the world is supremely evil in the eyes of God" (*ibid.* I, iv, 4). For "inasmuch as there is naught that equals God, the soul that loves some other thing together with Him," that is, as if it were equal to God, "or clings to it, wrongs Him greatly. And if this is so, what would it be doing if it loved anything more than God?" (*ibid.* I, v, 5).

We must not forget, in reading such statements, that St. John is here thinking of creatures as "compared with God," and that far from denying their goodness he asserts it; they are beautiful, full of graces and goodness, "crumbs that have fallen from the table of God" (*ibid.* I, vi, 3),

"endowed with innumerable graces and virtues . . . traces of the passing of God . . . the lesser works of God " which He made " very good in the Word, His Son " (S.C. vi). It is, indeed, the very fact of their greatness, beauty and goodness which constitutes their danger to the soul, ever tempted to cling to and rest in them, as those of whom the Apostle writes, who " worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator " (Rom. i, 25). The care with which St. John avoids any suspicion of a morbid or Puritanic view of creatures will be seen even more clearly when we come to his teaching on detachment.

In coming more directly to the Saint's teaching upon human nature it must be remembered that, in common with the theologians, he is concerned with what that nature is in itself, that is, as God created it, not with what it has become by sin. The distinction is important, and lies at the very root of his subject, indeed, at any real understanding of the Christian religion, the whole purpose of which is not simply to save the soul from sin, as in popular estimation, but to unite man to God. That grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ has for its end the recreation of the whole of man's nature, disordered by sin, but still capable of being " renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created it." And the manner of this renewal, the way in which " grace perfects nature," is only to be seen when that nature in itself is understood. This involves the attempt, necessary also because St. John constantly refers to and builds upon it, to set forth as briefly as is possible that Christian philosophic view of man without the knowledge of which the reader of the Saint's works will often find himself " at sea."

Man, as all creatures, is a composite of two essential principles, matter and form. Matter is the something of which all things are made; the definition is vague since matter has no existence as a " thing-in-itself " apart from " form," that which makes it this thing or that. We only know matter in conjunction with form, so that we cannot say more of it than that it is a passive capacity or potentiality

to receive a "form." We can apply Fr. D'Arcy's description of "pure potency" to matter: it "is just what is not nothing; it is indistinctness, the principle of indefiniteness, multiplicity, barbarism waiting to be civilized, a formless void distinct from nothingness only by its capacity to receive form" (Thomas Aquinas, p. 117). Those familiar with modern physical science, which no longer thinks of matter as a solid chunk of something but has reduced it almost to disappearing point, will see a certain similarity with the scholastic idea of matter.¹

"Form" is the active principle by which matter is determined to be this or that thing, tree, animal, man. It is as the idea of a picture in the mind of an artist, of a poem or play in the mind of a poet or dramatist, or of a symphony in that of a composer. It is this "form" or "idea" which gathers up and impresses upon certain undefined matter, canvas and paint, words, musical notes, a definite character, produces the *Monna Lisa* or Raphael's *Santa Famiglia*, the *Divina Commedia* and *King Lear*, Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* and that of Brahms in E Minor. We are more familiar with this use of the word as when we speak of "a form of worship," that is, worship, a general thing brought under and shaped to a particular kind of worship, e.g. Mass, or Buddhist or Calvinistic worship. So we may say that matter is a something which is capable of being made into "a" thing; form is that which does so make this something to be "a" thing, so that nothing can exist save as made to be "this" existing thing by some form. But further—and here we come to a principle St. John enunciates more than once, no one object or thing can have more than one form, since it is the form which confers unity upon each object, binds its various and complex parts together, not merely as a bundle of unrelated things, but as a substantial, recognizable "one" thing. So, says St. John, "two contraries cannot co-exist in one person" (A. I, iv, 2;

¹ The Scholastics distinguish between "first" and "second" matter, the former being that which can only be known by the intellect, the latter being the combination of matter and form which is cognizable by the senses, and is what physical science studies.

VI, i, 3, etc.) and "in natural generation no form can be introduced unless the preceding, contrary form is first expelled from the subject, which form, while present, is an impediment to the other by reason of the contrariety which the two have between each other" (*ibid.* I, vi, 2). The spiritual truth he uses this bit of philosophy to illustrate will be considered in its place, here we merely note his use of it which enforces the need of our knowing what he is referring to, which is the Thomistic theory outlined above. A simple illustration will suffice. Under the determining influence of heat water loses its liquid form and takes on that of steam, under that of cold, it becomes ice. But it cannot be at once liquid, steam and ice, for these are contraries; to receive the form of one, the others must disappear; *generatio unius corruptio alterius*, the generation of one is the corruption of the other, say the scholastics. The substantial nature remains the same, but the coming in of new accidental qualities produces a new form which can only exist upon the disappearance of the old one. Translated into terms of the spiritual life, the old man, the natural man, as St. Paul says, must be put off that the new, spiritual man may be put on.

Human nature, then, is a compound of matter and form, or, as we commonly say, of body and soul, the soul being the form, the active, living, vitalizing principle of every human activity. A soulless, a dead body is not, properly speaking, a body but only rapidly disintegrating matter which has lost that which made it a body, conferred upon it that unified personality which enables a man to see and know himself *to be* one person who, despite the complexity of his nature can say, *I go, I love, I think, I do this or that*. For human nature is a substantial unity composed of matter and form, the physical and the spiritual, so that man is rightly defined as a rational animal. And it is essential to note that this unity of body and soul is not as of two things joined side by side, in which there might be the possibility of one acting without the other, but soul and body are the one person whose every thought and act, of whatever kind

it may be are of the self, the *ego*, the person who is a body-soul. From this fact arises the dependence of body upon soul and of soul upon body, the effect which any movement in one has upon the other, a well-known though not always understood or adverted to fact which St. John, as the acute psychologist he is, notes more than once, as, for instance, when in describing the three signs which mark the time of passing from discursive meditation to contemplation, he says that the three must go together, "for although he observe his inability to reason and think upon the things of God," which is the first sign, "and likewise his distaste for thinking upon other and different things," the second sign, "this might proceed from melancholy or from some other indisposition of the brain or the body" (*A. II*, xiii, 6). Or still more striking is his treatment of the intimate relation of soul and body in *The Dark Night*, where speaking of the imperfections of beginners in respect to the sin of luxury, that is, spiritual lust, he says, "It often happens that, in their very spiritual exercises, without their being able to prevent it, there arise and present themselves in the sensitive part of the soul impure acts and motions," the reason for this being "that when the spirit and sense are pleased, every part of a man is moved by that pleasure to delight according to its own way and manner. For then the spirit, which is the higher part, is moved to pleasure and delight in God; and the sensitive nature, which is the lower part, is moved to pleasure and delight of the senses, because it cannot know or lay hold upon any other, and therefore it lays hold upon that which is nearest to itself, which is the impure and sensual. . . . There are some souls so tender and frail naturally, that when there comes to them some spiritual consolation or delight in prayer, the spirit of luxury is with them immediately, inebriating and delighting their sensual nature in such manner that they are, as it were, immersed in the enjoyment and pleasure of this sin . . . the reason for this is that, since their natures are, as I say, frail and tender, their humours and their blood are excited by any disturbance." In the former case we

have an example of the influence of body upon spirit, in the latter, of spirit upon body. For as "these two parts form one subject, they ordinarily both participate in that which one of them receives, each after its own manner; for, as the philosopher says, everything that is received is in the recipient after the manner of the recipient" (*D.N.* I, iv).

Another illustration of the close relation between soul and body is to be found in St. John's emphatic statement that whatever part sensible consolations may play in the early stages of the spiritual life, they can and do become a hindrance to its later growth and must be entirely set on one side. "This sensible sweetness is quite an ordinary thing with spiritual persons, for it comes to them from their sensible affection and devotion to a greater or less degree, to each one after his own manner. And it must be known that, although all these things may happen to the bodily senses in the way of God, we must never rely upon or admit them, . . . for the more completely exterior and corporeal they are, the less certainly are they of God. For it is more proper and habitual to God to communicate Himself to the spirit, in which there is more security and profit to the soul, than to sense, wherein there is ordinarily much danger and deception; for bodily sense judges and estimates spiritual things by thinking that they are as it feels them to be, whereas they are as different as is the body from the soul, and sense-perception from reason" (*A.* II, xi, 1, 2). All through his works, especially in *The Ascent* and *The Dark Night*, the Saint warns us against imagining that emotions and feelings aroused by religious exercises are of the higher part of our nature, that which alone is capable of a real contact with God. We think them to be spiritual, of the soul, when in fact they are largely of the body, and this illusion is due to that close union of soul and body which we are considering.

On the other hand, when the soul has reached the "powers and height of the spirit . . . the affection of feeling overflows from spirit into sense," for as the Saint has said already, "God bestows no favours upon the body without

bestowing them first and principally upon the soul " (*L.F.* ii, 12-14), and again, the soul " tastes of the things of God . . . and of this good which comes to the soul a part sometimes overflows into the body through the union of the spirit, and this is enjoyed by all the substance of sense and all the members of the body " (*ibid.* ii, 19).

The substantial unity of human nature is illustrated, too, by the way in which St. John uses the term soul as embracing the whole man. When he says that the soul does this or that he is not thinking, as does the average modern, of the soul as distinct from the body, a mysterious something occupied only with specifically " religious " matters, a sort of special organ with purely " spiritual " functions ; he is thinking of the whole man as a spiritual being, whose every activity, bodily and spiritual, is set in motion and determined by the highest side of his nature. This is the reason why he seldom speaks of " soul " and " body," but of the higher and lower or sensitive and spiritual or rational parts of the soul. " That part which concerns the creatures and temporal things, which is the sensitive and lower part," and " the part which has respect to God and to spiritual things, which is the rational and higher part " (*A.* II, iv, 2 ; cf. i, 2 ; II, i, 2 ; II, ii, 2). And in *The Spiritual Canticle*, commenting on the words

My soul has employed itself
And all my possessions in his service.

" By all her possessions she here understands all that pertains to the sensitive part of the soul . . . in this part is included the body with all its senses and faculties, both interior and exterior " (*S.C.* xix, 3), and later, upon the lines

O Nymphs of Judæa . . . dwell in the suburbs.

he writes, " By Judæa she means the lower part of the soul, which is that of the senses . . . and by nymphs she means all the imaginations, fancies, motions and affections of this lower part," which " operations and motions of sense contrive to attract the will pleasantly to themselves from the

rational part of the soul . . . its suburbs are the interior senses, such as the phantasy, the imagination, the memory, wherein meet and gather the phantasies and imaginations and forms of things . . . which enter these suburbs of the inward senses through the gates of the exterior senses, which are hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch . . . that which is called city in the soul is that most inward part, which is the rational part, that which has capacity for communion with God " (S.C. xxxi, 4).

The case of ecstasy, trances and similar phenomena further illustrates the unity of human nature, but as St. John passes over these " because the Blessed Teresa of Jesus, our mother, left notes admirably written upon these things of the spirit " (S.C. xii, 6), we shall not do more than note the fact here, the more so, that such phenomena do not constitute an essential part of the mystic life.

There are passages in the Saint's writings in which the terms soul and spirit seem to be used synonymously, but he also makes a clear distinction between them, not in the sense of their being two different things, but in that soul stands for the sensitive part and spirit for the rational part of human nature. All his teaching is concerned with the passage of the soul from a natural, elementary state in which, as he says, " as soon as God infuses it into the body is like a smooth blank board (*table rasa*) upon which nothing is painted ; and save for that which it experiences through the senses, nothing is communicated to it, in the course of nature, from any other source " (A. I, iii, 3), to a state of union with God in which His favours are granted to the higher part " in spirit only," for, as we have seen, the rational part is that which alone has " capacity for communion with God." In this state " the soul is wont . . . to see itself so far withdrawn and separated, according to the higher and spiritual part, from the sensitive and lower part that it recognizes in itself two parts so distinct from each other that it seems that the one has naught to do with the other, but that the one is very remote and separated from the other. And in reality, in a certain way, this is so ; for the operation

is now wholly spiritual, and is not communicated to the sensitive part. In this way the soul is becoming wholly spiritual " (*D.N.* ii, xxiii, 14). The Saint speaks frequently of " perfect," " true," " inward," " pure " spirituality, and " purity of spirit " in which the soul, having passed through the dark nights of sense and spirit, " receives only that which is given to it," and this directly from God who is Spirit, to the highest part of the soul, that is, the spirit, in which all natural operation of its own has ceased in the attainment of the " third night . . . which is the perfection of the communication of God in the spirit " (*A. I.* ii, 4) ; and also of " the substance of the soul " which is the same innermost depth of the soul to which " the touch of God brings great satisfaction and comfort " which " touch is also called a whisper, because even as the whisper which is caused by the air enters subtly into the organ of hearing, even so this most subtle and delicate knowledge enters . . . into the inmost substance of the soul," being received by the " passive " or " possible " intellect, as the philosophers call it, not by the active intellect which uses images and notions derived from the senses (*L.F.* xiii, 14).

The last quotation shows that we are, as it were, getting on too fast, and must, in order to make it as clear as is necessary for the present, return to the soul in itself and its faculties which, according to St. John, are the intellect, memory and will. And in case there may be among our readers those who are moved to the impatient question, what has all this philosophy got to do with what we have always taken to be a book concerned with the spiritual life ? we must answer that the " spiritual " life, according to all the masters, is the life of the intellectual, rational man raised to his highest state, and that it is St. John's precise purpose to show this to be so and to free the term " spiritual " from all those low conceptions which view it as an emotion of the senses, divorced from any rational foundation and content. St. John is, above all, a " practical " mystic, that is he deals with things as they are, not as the pious dreamer or the religiously-minded æsthete imagines them to

be. No one can "let himself go" more in poetic and lyrical description of the things of the spiritual order than he does, but soar as he may above our heads, he is ever aware that it is man, the rational animal, whose life and progress toward God he is speaking of. And it is only when we see human nature as he sees it that his teaching assumes that practical aspect which otherwise may be lost sight of.

The soul, says St. John, in its nature, is as perfect as when God created it, and that perfection consists in its being in His image and likeness, a spiritual substance of a rational, willing nature, having its own life and united to the body for the perfecting of that life. "It is to be known that the soul lives in that which it loves rather than in the body which it animates, because it has not its life in the body, but rather gives it to the body, and lives in that which it loves. But beside this life of love . . . the soul has its natural and radical life in God, as have all created things" (*S.C.* viii, 2). And again, "it must be known that the soul, being spirit, has not height and depth, nor greater or less degrees of profundity in its own being, as have quantitative bodies," i.e. material bodies. "For since there are no parts in the soul," a material substance has parts but not a spiritual substance, "there is no difference between its interior and its exterior being; it is all one, and has no depths of greater or lesser profundity in a way that can be measured" (*L.F.* i, 10), so that "there is more difference between the soul and other corporeal creatures than between a liquid that is highly clarified and mud that is most foul" (*A.* I, ix, 1).

The term "substance," as used above by St. John of the soul, and when, for instance, he speaks of "the Substance of God" touching the "substance of the soul," must be understood in a strictly metaphysical sense as meaning "a being in itself," i.e. a nature or being which has existence in itself not in another, and in this sense a "spiritual" substance is more substantial and real than a merely material, physical one.

The human soul has many activities which it exercises

by means of what are called faculties or powers, which are proximate principles of the soul's operation. These powers of the soul's activity are both distinct from the essence of the soul itself and from each other. That they are distinct from the soul itself though proceeding from it may be seen by the fact that although the soul is always in act it is not always performing the same activities, as, in sleep, for instance, all the activities of which we are conscious, cease to operate for a time, although the essence of the soul is still in act as the principle of life. That the faculties are distinct from each other is obvious since we are conscious of the fact that understanding is a different activity to that of willing or remembering, as hearing and seeing are different activities of the same person. And no one or all of these various activities exhaust the total capacity or energy of the soul.

This last fact, of the distinction between the soul itself and its faculties, is of importance to the understanding of St. John, since much of his teaching is based upon it. For it is only when all the faculties are at rest and in a passive state (*vide*, p. 165) that the soul can be perfectly united to God (*A. I*, ii, 4). "The higher portion of my soul being, as also the lower part, at rest with respect to its desires and faculties, I went forth to the Divine union of the love of God. . . . As soon as these two houses of the soul have together become tranquillized and strengthened, with all their servants, that is, the faculties and desires, and have put them all to sleep and caused them to be silent with regard to all things, both above and below, this Divine Wisdom immediately unites Himself to the soul" (*D.N.* II, xxiv, 1, 3). Here, as in a number of other passages, as well as in his whole doctrine of the necessity of the two nights, we have the clear distinction marked between the house—the substance of the soul to which the Divine Wisdom unites Himself—and the desires and faculties which must cease their activity in order that this substantial union may be consummated.

Further, we shall see that St. John distinguishes between the purification of the soul "in regard to its faculties and

to its substance" (*L.F.* i, 14), and also that in the high estate of spiritual marriage, whilst the soul remains permanently in this state, after God "has placed it therein," yet this is not so with regard to the faculties, for "the union of the faculties is not continuous in this life, neither can be so" (*S.C.* First Redaction, xvii, 9; Second Redaction, xxvi, 11).

As we have spoken of the sensitive and the rational soul, as does St. John following the scholastic tradition, we must point out that this does not mean that there are two souls in man. The soul, it has been said, is the first principle of all life and source of all the activities of living as differentiated from non-living beings. Thus we speak of the nutritive soul of the things of the plant world, that which is the principle of their life and movement; of the sensitive soul of animals, and of the rational soul in man. The vegetable and animal souls are produced with the body of the plant or animal and cease to exist with it, but the rational, human soul is the creation of God, and has a proper existence and life of its own apart from the body upon which it confers life. This rational soul contains whatever belongs to the nutritive soul of plants and the sensitive soul of animals, so that in man there is but one "form" or soul actuating all that he is and does.

The faculties or activities of the soul which, for the purpose of our subject, require some consideration, are of two orders, those which belong to the lower or sensitive part, *parte sensitiva* in St. John's terms, and those of the higher, spiritual or rational part, *parte espiritual*. He sometimes uses the word *sensual* in the old English sense of lust, i.e. inordinate desire or appetite, not in the more modern use of the word, but usually of the sensitive part of the soul. To the sensitive part of the soul belong the five external senses by means of which it perceives the things of the external world, sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell, for as St. Thomas says, "the whole bodily nature is subject to the soul," and St. John in agreement with the Angelic Doctor teaches that all the soul's knowledge comes through

these senses. "Save through that which it experiences through the senses, nothing is communicated to it, in the course of nature, from any other source" (*A. I, iii, 3*); "a man can know nothing by himself, save after a natural manner, which is only that which he attains by means of the senses" (*A. II, iii, 2*).

To this sensitive part belong also the four interior senses or powers, which are, the common sense, phantasy or imagination, the estimative and memorative powers. By the common sense is meant that power by which we are enabled to combine, compare and discriminate between the sensations we experience through the five external senses. Each one of these has its own special object and its distinctive function, sight from hearing, taste from touch or smell. We might compare them to five separate offices in one business house, in each of which a special department is attended to without relation to the other four. The common sense is, as it were, a central office, where the work and results of the other five are correlated, compared and estimated. Each external sense receives its own object, hearing of sound, sight of colour, etc., and the internal common sense is the common term to which all the perceptions of the outer senses are referred and by which they are discerned and judged.

Phantasy and imagination are really the same; "the first thing that has now to be considered is the interior corporeal sense which is the imagination and phantasy . . . two interior corporeal senses which are called imagination and phantasy, which are ordered to the service of the one and the other. For the one sense reasons in an imaginative manner, and the other forms the imagination or that which is imagined, by the phantasy. . . . For our purpose the treatment of the one is the same as that of the other. . . . All that, then, these senses can receive and fashion are called imaginations and phantasies, which are forms," that is mental pictures or notions, "represented to these senses by bodily figures and images." When this is done in a natural as opposed to a supernatural way, these mental

pictures are actively produced by the soul operating through this imaginative faculty, as when, for instance, in meditation "which is a discursive activity performed by means of images, forms and figures fashioned and imagined by the said senses, as when we imagine Christ crucified or bound to the column, or in some other way . . . or when we imagine various other things, whether human or Divine, that fall under the imagination" (A. II, xii, 3). "For this sense of phantasy, together with the memory, is as an archive and storehouse of the intellect, in which are received all intelligible forms and images, and thus the soul has them within itself, as in a mirror, having received them by means of the five exterior senses . . . (which) represent the species and images of their objects to these interior senses" (*ibid.* II, xvi, 2, 3). So also in *The Living Flame* he speaks of "the common sense (*sentido común*) of the phantasy to which repair, with the forms of their objects, the corporeal senses, so that it becomes the receptacle and archive of them" (*L.F.*, Second Redaction, iii, 69).

The proper function, then, of the imagination or phantasy is to receive, picture and hold, as in a storehouse, the things of the common sense as it receives them from the five exterior senses, to recall and reproduce them in imaginative pictures or figures, and to unite them one to the other. These pictures or figures are what St. John calls "natural phantasms" *fantasmas naturales* (A. II, i, 2), since they are formed by the natural processes of the interior senses. The distinction between this sense of the imagination and that of the common sense is that the latter only deals with the *present here and now*, whilst the imagination deals with everything perceived by the common sense but without adverting to the fact of presence or absence at the moment. It will be seen that much of this work of the imagination is commonly thought of as belonging to the memory, but, as a faculty of the sensitive part of the soul, its work is not to recall the past object or act, but to recognize it *as past* when it is recalled by the mind. The two are, of course, closely connected as St. John implies in passages in which he speaks

of "the memory, with the imagination," although he distinguishes one from the other, as when he says that "when the memory is united to God . . . it remains without form of figure, *its imagination* being lost, and itself being absorbed in a supreme good" (A. III, ii, 4). Here, and throughout his discussion of the active purgation of the memory in the third book of *The Ascent*, St. John seems to think of memory as a power both of the sensitive and rational parts of the soul. As the first, it practically embraces the imagination, as the second, which he calls "the spiritual memory" (A. III, xiv, 1), the imagination and phantasy has no part. Of the memory in a general sense he says that it has three kinds of knowledge, "natural and supernatural, imaginary and spiritual" (*ibid.* III, i, 2). "Natural knowledge in the memory is all that which the memory can form concerning the objects of the five corporeal senses . . . and of all those kinds of knowledge which the soul can form or make in this manner" (*ibid.* III, ii, 4). The imaginary kind of knowledge is of supernatural things such as "visions, revelations, locutions and feelings," which although they come in a supernatural way to the soul, yet are received by the sensitive memory, for "when these things have passed into the soul, there remains impressed upon it some form, figure or notion, whether in the soul or in the memory or in the phantasy" (*ibid.* III, vii, 1). Spiritual knowledge is classed "as the third kind of the apprehensions of the memory, not because they pertain to the corporeal sense of the phantasy, as the others, since they have no corporeal image or form; but because they are also knowable by spiritual memory and reminiscence." Such, he continues, may be recalled whenever the soul wills, "and this is not by the effigy or image that such apprehension has left in the bodily sense, for the corporeal being, as we say, has no capacity for spiritual forms; but because it recalls it, intellectually and spiritually, by means of that form which it has left impressed upon the soul, which is also a form or notion or formal and spiritual image by which it is recalled, or by the effect which it has had" (*ibid.* III, xiv, 1).

The other two powers of the sensitive soul, the first of which is that which we commonly call instinct, and the second, the memorative, which is that by which we recall the past by a series of discursive steps, not suddenly or without effort, but by tracing one thing back to another, need not detain us, as St. John's use of the term *reminiscence*, sometimes applied to this power, is not identical with it, as he says that it refers to what may be recalled at will.

It may be well to note that these interior senses are not to be confounded with the "spiritual senses" which will be treated in a later chapter.

We come now to the higher or rational part of the soul to which belong, according to St. Thomas, the two faculties of intellect and will, and, according to St. John, those of Intellect, Memory and Will. Commentators upon St. John do not agree as to the reason why St. John should have departed from the scholastic enumeration. One Carmelite writer claims that he does so deliberately, and in this stands alone in asserting a *real* distinction between the intellect and the memory, but admits that he does not know why St. John did so, unless, as he suspects, it was due to St. John's following in this the English Carmelite doctor, John Bacon, who taught that the proper object of the intellectual memory was the particular past *as past*, which St. Thomas denies, in view of the doctrine that the intellect is concerned, not with the particular but the universal. Another Carmelite combats this assertion and says that St. John does not make a *real* distinction, in a philosophical sense, between the intellect and the memory, and that the difference between St. Thomas and St. John on this question is only apparent not actual. It does not, indeed, seem probable that on one point alone and that without any note or explanation, St. John would separate himself from the Thomistic teaching to which he so consistently adheres, and the most likely interpretation of the apparent contradiction is that he is not writing primarily as a philosopher but as a guide to the higher reaches of the spiritual and mystic life, and that as such he naturally adopts the traditional Augustinian division of the

faculties which is common to all spiritual writers, who treat the subject, not from the ontological point of view, as does St. Thomas, but from the psychological and spiritual one. Moreover this threefold division of the faculties of the rational soul peculiarly suits St. John's practical purpose which is to show the need of the entire purification of the soul and the silencing of the activity of its powers that God alone may dwell within it, and the means, both active and passive, by which this is to be accomplished. So he regards the intellect as distinct from the memory, in that its special function is to perceive the intelligible world, i.e. the inner "forms" of things, of which the senses only perceive the outward matter, whilst that of the memory, with the imagination, is to picture in phantasms or images the things perceived by the intellect and to keep them in mind.

The intellect, for which St. John commonly uses the term *entendimiento*, usually translated understanding, is the highest power of the soul, that by which man apprehends the true nature of things by abstracting from them all that is of the particular in order to grasp the universal and make all things his own after his own manner. It constitutes the most perfect form of life, the life which is nearest, with the exception of that of the angels, to that of God Himself, and this because it is capable of not only seeing, reflecting upon and understanding things other than itself, but because it can reflect upon and understand itself, in which intellectual act, the mind is in the image and likeness of God, the perfection of whose life is that He knows Himself by Himself. St. John expresses the high dignity which the intellect holds in man when he says : "One single thought of a man is of greater worth than the whole world" (Maxim 32 in Peer's edition, vol. iii, p. 245), as also in the way he emphasizes the need of man's using his natural reason, God "ever desires that men should use their own reason inasmuch as is possible, and all things" (as fall within the limits of human judgment and reason) "have to be regulated by reason, save those that are of faith, which exceed all judgment and reason, although they are not contrary

to it" (A. II, xxii, 13). It should be noted that although they are commonly regarded as the same, intellect and reason are different activities, being related one to the other as the perfect to the imperfect. The intellect penetrates into and possesses, by its act of knowing, the essential reality of beings; the reason "is the necessary imperfection of the intellect," says St. Thomas, "by which the mind arrives at truth by a discursive process, reasoning from one thing to another." The highest act of understanding, that is, of intellectual apprehension, is an intuition which is the more direct as the intellect is the more perfect. The Intellect of God is Pure Intuition, that of the Angels is much less perfect, being created, but more perfect than that of man since it directly perceives the nature of immaterial things, whilst man can only do so according to his nature, that is through the medium of the senses. This brings us to the consideration of the way in which the human soul or mind gains its knowledge. The soul, says St. John, "as long as it is in the body, is like one who is in a dark prison and who knows nothing, save what he can see through its windows; and if he saw nothing through them, he would see nothing in any other way. And thus the soul, save for that which is communicated to it through the senses, which are the windows of its prison, could acquire nothing naturally in any other way" (A. I, iii, 3). "For this cause he must have the phantasms and figures of objects present in themselves or in their resemblances; in no other way can he gain knowledge for as philosophers say: *Ab objecto et potentia paritur notitia*. That is: from the object that is present and the faculty, knowledge is born in the soul" (*ibid.* II, iii, 2). For "the order in which the soul gains knowledge is through forms and images of created things, and the manner by which it gains this knowledge and wisdom is through the senses" (*ibid.* II, xvii, 3).

We rightly speak of the substance of a thing, that is, that which it is as a thing existing in itself, and of its accidents which are the qualities which inhere in and are dependent upon the thing-in-itself. Now the senses, says St. John, "cannot grasp or attain to more than the accident" (*ibid.*

III, xx, 2), and that "substance cannot be communicated to the senses" (S.C. xxxii, 4). The five external senses only apprehend the outside of things, that which is material and physical about them; the interior senses only grasp the images or phantasms of things; the intellect alone is capable of apprehending the "forms" and substance of things which are of a spiritual, immaterial nature which "the sensitive part has no capacity to receive" (D.N. I, ix, 4).

Two more facts concerning the intellect enter into St. John's teaching. First that it is characterized as being both passive or, as it is also called, possible, and as active. The distinction is between the capacity or possibility of the intellect to receive knowledge, and the activity of the intellect which makes what is so received intelligible. "The soul," says St. John, "is like a blank board," that is, it does not come into being possessed of ideas or knowledge. But by its nature it is capable of, as it were, being written upon, it has the passive capacity of understanding even though it does not at once or always understand, so that, as Aristotle says, "to understand is in a way to be passive," and St. Thomas, "at first we are only in potentiality to understand, and afterwards we are made to understand actually" (S.T. I, lxxix, 11). The active intellect is that which makes things actually intelligible to us. The content of our knowledge, as we have seen, comes through the senses which, as St. John says, are the windows of the soul, or in other words the passive intellect is moved to act through what the senses convey to it. Thus by means of the sense of sight the mind perceives this rose, tree, house, dog, planet, etc., and the interior senses of memory and imagination form a sense-impression, a picture or phantasm of these things. So far we have gained an impression of something but none of our senses, exterior or interior, can tell us *what* this something is. This is the work of the active intellect which makes the phantasm, the imaginative picture or idea, intelligible because it, being an immaterial faculty, can alone understand the immaterial "forms" of things. Thus

St. Thomas says, "intellectual cognition does not consist in the phantasms themselves, but in them it contemplates the purity of intelligible truth" (*S.T.* ii, 11^{ae}, clxxx, 5).

We have seen already what St. John has to say about the dependence of the soul or mind upon the senses, and about the work of the interior senses. Of the possible and passive intellect in connection with the mystic knowledge which God imparts to the substance of the soul, he writes that this "substance of knowledge is given to it, stripped of accidents and phantasms, for it is given to the intellect which philosophers call "passive" or "possible" (*S.C.* xiv, 14), and later, that this "secret and hidden wisdom of God" is given "without the service or aid of any bodily or spiritual sense, as in the silence and quiet of the night, in darkness to all that which is of the sensible and natural, God teaches the soul after a most hidden and secret manner, without her knowing how . . . for this is not done by the active intellect, as the philosophers call it, which works in forms and phantasms and apprehensions of things; but it is done in the intellect inasmuch as it is possible and passive, which, without receiving such forms passively receives substantial knowledge, which is given to it without any active office or work of its own" (*ibid.* xxxviii, 9).

It is essential to note that in the above passages St. John, whilst speaking of the possible and passive intellect, is not speaking of the manner in which natural or acquired knowledge is gained, but of a supernatural and mystical knowledge infused into the soul by God. Of natural knowledge, with which the philosopher is alone concerned, St. John says plainly that the intellect "can understand nothing save that which is contained within, and comes under the forms and phantasies of things that are received through the bodily senses" (*A.* II, viii, 4). But there are two ways by which "the intellect can receive knowledge and intelligence; the one natural, the other supernatural. By the natural is all that the intellect can understand whether by means of the bodily senses or by its own act. The supernatural is all that is *given* to the intellect being above its

natural ability and capacity " (A. II, x, 2), " for of itself it extends only to natural knowledge, although it has a faculty for the supernatural " (*ibid.* II, iii, 1).

Now, concerned as St. John is, above all, with the direct communication of God Himself to the soul in the mystic state, he extends the capacity of the passive or possible intellect beyond the limits assigned to it by the psychology of the philosopher, who is only viewing it in relation to natural knowledge, and sees it as the deep capacity of the substance of the soul to receive the " essential communication of the Divinity without any intervening means in the soul, through a certain contact thereof with the Divinity, which is a thing far removed from all sense and accidents, inasmuch as it is the touch of pure substances, that is, of the soul and the Divinity " (S.C. xxxii, 3). What, indeed, he describes as coming to pass is a unification of all the powers of the soul, in which " when the soul attains to interior union with God, the spiritual faculties no longer work in it, still less do the corporeal faculties, inasmuch as the work of union of love is already accomplished, and thus the faculties have ceased to work, since, having reached their end, all the operations of the means cease " (*ibid.* xxv, 7). And again, speaking of the preparation of the soul " for receiving the favours which are enjoyed " in the Spiritual Marriage, he says, " that the passions of the soul and the spiritual and natural desires are now held in subjection " ; and " the sensitive part has now been reformed and purified in conformity with the spiritual, so that not only is it not disturbed but is rather united with the spirit participating in its blessings. . . . "

And the cavalry came down at the sight of the waters.

" By these waters are here understood the spiritual delights and blessings of God whereof in this estate the soul has fruition. By the cavalry are understood the faculties of the sensitive part, both interior and exterior which, says the Bride, come down in this estate at the sight of these spiritual waters, for the sensitive part of the soul is so purified and spiritualized in this estate that the soul with its

sensitive faculties and natural forces is gathered together in one to participate in and enjoy, after its manner, the spiritual grandeurs which God is communicating to the spirit . . . and it is to be noted that the Bride does not say here that the cavalry came down to taste of the waters, but that it came down at the sight of them, for this sensitive part with its faculties cannot essentially and properly taste of spiritual blessings, because they have not a proportionate capacity for this, either in this life or the next ; but through a certain overflowing of the spirit they receive refreshment and delight, by which these faculties and senses of the body are drawn into that interior recollection, wherein the soul is drinking of spiritual blessings " (S.C. XXXIX, i, 5, 6 ; cf. A. III, ii, 8).

The second fact is contained in St. John's references to the scholastic dictum, *Cognitum est in cognoscente secundum naturam cognoscentis*, that which is known is in the knower, according to the nature of the knower, or as St. John puts it : Whatever is received is in the recipient according to the manner of the recipient (*D.N.* II, xvi, 4), or as in an earlier chapter he speaks of the intellect as " the receptacle of all other objects according to its own mode of operation " (*A.* III, i, 1).

St. John is here in the very heart of the Thomistic doctrine of knowledge. We have seen already that all our knowledge comes through the external senses : it begins with the perception of things existent outside ourselves, not as Descartes imagined, with ideas in the mind. We do not proceed from thoughts to things but from things to thoughts. The senses perceive the particular and individual, this house, that tree, this man, and so on. The intellect, using the imagination, forms a phantasm, image or idea of the thing seen by the senses, and by reflection passes beyond the particular and individual to the universal, the intelligible concept of " house " or " tree " or " humanity," which has no existence save in the mind. But when we say that we know a thing, what is it that we know ? The thing itself or our idea of the thing ? St. Thomas, with his common-

sense way of dealing with a subject, replies, "We know the thing itself, not merely the idea of it, for knowledge is a possession, an assimilation by which that which is known is actually within the mind which knows it. The idea is not *that* which we see; it is that *by which* we see" (cf. *S.T.* I, lxxxv, 2). "The stone is that which is known, and not the idea of the stone, except indirectly by the act of reflection in which the intellect turns back upon itself, otherwise our knowledge would be only of ideas instead of things," and if this were so all physical science would be impossible, nor could we ever distinguish the truth about things from what they often seem to be as perceived by the senses (*ibid.* I, lxxvi, 2). To put this in another way, in an act of knowledge, we do actually possess the thing known, not merely a photograph of it. But how, in what manner do we possess it? According to our own manner, that is, the manner or mode of operation of the intellect, which is that of an immaterial, spiritual substance. The stone we know has a material existence outside the mind, by knowing it the mind assimilates the stone *after its own manner*, so that it has an immaterial existence within the mind, for "to know is a purely immaterial operation by which the essential nature of a thing is distinguished from the particular matter in which it is visible to the senses." The intellect does not apprehend things according to *their* manner of existence, that is the work of the senses, "but according to its own manner of operation" (*S.T.* I, ii). Just as the bodily organs take up and transform all kinds of food into the body in their own way, so the intellect takes the food presented to it by the senses and transforms it into itself after its own manner so that "the thing known is in the knower after the manner of the knower," not in the manner it exists outside of the knower. And the human intellect possesses an infinite capacity for knowledge, the capacity for making all things its own of becoming, as says St. John, "the receptacle of all other objects." Nothing is too great for it, not even God Himself, since man is *capax Dei*, capable of God. The capacity of the understanding, memory and

will "is deep ; for that which they are capable of containing is God, who is deep and infinite" (*L.F.* iii, 21), a capacity, as the Apostle says, of "being filled with the fulness of God." But, mark, still after their own manner, and that is what causes St. John to refer to this philosophical account of the intellect and its mode of knowing. For "since these natural faculties have neither purity nor strength nor capacity to receive or taste supernatural things *after the manner of these things*, which is Divine, but only *after their own manner*, which is human and low, it is fitting that they should be in darkness concerning these Divine things" (*D.N.* II, xvi. 4).

The third faculty of the soul, according to St. John's enumeration, is that of the will, with its four passions, joy, hope, grief and fear, and its desires and affections, from which it is necessary that it should be freed "for the whole business of attaining to union with God consists in purging the will from its affections and desires ; so that from being a mere, human will, it may become a Divine will, being made one with the will of God" (*A.* III, xvi, 3). Since we shall have to deal fully with this in a later chapter, we need only note here St. John's agreement and distinction from the Thomistic doctrine of the primacy of the intellect over the will, and his valuable distinction between the "feeling" and the "operation" of the will.

He refers to the Thomistic dictum that, only that which is known can be loved, and adds, "This is true, but chiefly so in the *natural* acts and operations of the soul, wherein the will loves only that which is distinctly understood by the intellect." But in mystical contemplation, wherein God infuses both knowledge and love into the soul in one act, "there is no necessity for distinct knowledge, nor for the soul to perform any acts of the intellect" (*L.F.* iii, 49).

The distinction between the feeling and the operation of the will is to be found in a letter to one of his penitents, a priest (Letter XI in Professor Peer's edition), and is of such value in the present day that it must be quoted in full. The will, he teaches, has two operations, one passive, the other active. The first is that of the feeling or sentiment

of the will aroused by some object which it is drawn to love or to dislike. The second is the act or operation of the will which follows upon the arousing of the feeling, the activity of love or dislike in relation to the object. Thus the Saint writes, "Your Reverence must note that all that wherein the will can have a distinct joy is sweet and delectable, since this appears pleasant to it." But nothing in which the will can find joy is God, "for as God cannot come within the apprehensions of the other faculties, so neither can He come within the desires and pleasures of the will; for even as in this life the soul cannot taste of God essentially, so none of the sweetness and delights that it tastes, however sublime it be, can be God; for, further, all that the will can have pleasure in and desire as a distinct thing, it desires in so far as it knows it to be such or such an object . . . if, in any wise, the will can comprehend God and become united with Him, it is by no apprehensible means of the desire, but by love; and as none of these delectable feelings can be a proportionate means whereby the soul may unite itself to God, but only the operation of the will, for *the operation of the will is very different from its feeling*; it is through the operation that it becomes united to God, and has its end in Him, Who is Love, and not through the feeling and apprehension of its desire, which makes its home in the soul as its end and object. The feelings can only serve as motives for love if the will desires to pass beyond them, and not otherwise; and thus delectable feelings do not of themselves lead the soul to God, but cause it to rest in themselves; but in the operation of the will, which is to love God, the soul sets on Him alone its affection, joy, pleasure, contentment and love, leaving all things behind and loving Him above them all."

The application of this sound and necessary doctrine to the sentimental religiosity of our time, by no means confined to non-Catholics, will be obvious, and disturbing as it may be to many, needs to be insisted upon. Yet St. John's careful distinction between what is good and permissible in one stage of spiritual progress, but hindering

in another, must not be forgotten. Sensible feelings and emotions are valuable in the beginning of the spiritual life, which is one of spiritual childhood. But like all good things they are possible sources of danger, since they tend to fix the mind on the gifts of God rather than on God Himself, and to cause the idea that these sensible emotions are indications of spiritual progress or of an intimate contact of the soul with God. Thus when they cease, as they do, the soul imagines that it has lost its good, whereas, it is now really beginning to draw nearer to it, to "grow up" in the spiritual life, so that these childish things, if clung to or desired, would become an obstacle to it.

(I) *General Considerations*

THE panoramic view of the Christian life which St. John gives more than once in his works (*vide A. I, i, 2*; S.C. First Redaction, stanza xxvii, 2; Second Redaction, Introd., Argument) is one, it must be remembered, taken from the particular standpoint with which he is concerned, that is, the union of the soul with God in the high estate of perfection so far as it is possible in this life. It is, then, in its completeness, a view of the Christian life in its fullest form and attainment, of the progress and accomplishment of those who aspire to such union and whom God wills to raise to the state of Spiritual Marriage, and these, repeats the Saint, are few in number.

In reading St. John these facts must be kept in mind, and to this end it may be well to state them more fully.

First: The whole of his doctrine rests upon certain facts and truths concerning the Being of God, the nature of man, the end and purpose for which he was created, and the means by which that end is to be attained. Upon these foundations, composed of such disparate elements, he builds up a developed and coherent account of the relations between the Creator and the rational creature, relations which necessarily follow from the fact of what God is in Himself and of what is implied in the creation, nature and end of man. These facts concerning God and man determine the character of the means by which man attains to union with God, some of which are remote or indirect, others proximate or direct. The former, which comprise all the dogmas, practices and exercises—the “*appurtenances*” of religion, in Von Hügel’s phrase, are designed to lead to and increase the latter, that is, the virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity which alone directly unite the soul to God. For God is Spirit and only that which is purely spiritual, that is, not mixed

with or dependent upon the sensible, is capable of union with Him.

Second: Although St. John does not exclude from his thought any Christian soul, and has invaluable lessons for all, yet he is actually writing for those who "aspire to the summit of the Mount" and are aiming, not simply at detachment in the ordinary meaning of the term, but at "that detachment of the spirit," the highest point of the soul, with which he is most concerned. And by the summit of the Mount he does not mean the Beatific Vision of God in heaven, the Final End and Perfect Completion of man, but "the perfect union of the love of God, *as far as it is possible in this life*" (A. Prologue i), that union termed by the mystics the Spiritual Marriage "between the soul and the Son of God, her Spouse . . . wherein each is surrendered to the other, by total possession one of the other in the consummated union of love, *in so far as may be in this life*, in which the soul is made Divine and becomes God by participation, in the degree possible in this life, so that this is the highest estate to which it is possible to arrive in this life" (S.C. First Redaction, stanza, xxvii, 2). This state of union is but attained by a minority of Christians, and St. John goes further than ascribing this fact to the positive fault of the majority, he says that in some it is due to lack of knowledge. Thus, in comment upon our Lord's words, "Few there be that find it," he says, "the reason ought to be noted, which is that few have the knowledge and desire to enter into this full detachment and emptiness of spirit" (A. II, vii, 3), and again, he refers to those who "will not or know not how to go," but by the way of "sweetness of spirit or sense," and that God condescends to them, granting them that which is not best for them because of this ignorance or unwillingness, by which "they are unable to partake of the stronger and more solid food of the labours of the cross of His Son" (A. II, xxi, 3). Remembering the end St. John has in mind, we shall see that neither these words nor those in which he says that the gift of infused contemplation is not given to all by God, imply that any soul of goodwill

whatever its attainment in this life, will be deprived of the Vision of God which is man's final end. He who had ministered to the *aldeanos* and *rusticos* around Duruelo, to both the pious townspeople and the notorious sinners of Granada, and to the novices of his Order was not likely to be a man who proclaimed that there was but one way to heaven and that all were lost who walked not by it in the sense of attaining to that height of it in this life of which he writes. The fact is plain in the plan or diagram which the Saint drew for the nuns of Beas, in which it will be noted that beside the central *senda estrecha dela perfección*, the narrow path to perfection, there is the *camino de spiritu imperfecti*, the way of imperfect spirits, and the *camino de spiritu errado*, the way of erring spirits. The last actually leads away from the mount, whilst the *camino de spiritu imperfecto*, though it is long and winding, does turn toward and reaches the foothills of the mount though not—in his life—the summit itself.

St. John's meaning might be put in even closer relation to the facts by a diagram in which a narrow central way led straight to the goal of Divine union, but from which on either side another and wider way diverged, that on the right ever going farther away, that on the left winding and twisting but finally returning to the main way. But in this diagram there would be two additions, first of several other paths leading back to the central one indicating the various ways and moments in human lives when a soul again seeks the "narrow way"; and second, the sight of various souls on the central way, some advancing straitly and continuously, others in a wandering manner, slowly and fitfully, some sitting down and rising up again, others missing the way for a brief space but quickly returning—and so on. With regard to such greater or less manners and degrees of progress, we may note that St. John says that "ordinarily the soul has need of instruction upon that which comes to pass within it," and that if this "is wanting to it, even given that the soul desires not such things, it will become hardened without realizing it in the spiritual way and incline again to that of

sense" (*A.* II, xxii, 17). Again, in many places, he complains bitterly of the ways in which souls may be hindered by unskilful or even wrong direction (*vide A.*, Prologue, 3, 4; *L.F.* iii, 38 ff.). Other souls are full of good wishes, "desire much to see themselves at the end," but without the labour "of passing by the way and by the means which lead to it" (*S.C.* xxxv, 9). And there are those whom, "it is sad to see, labouring and fatiguing themselves greatly and yet going back, looking for profit in that which is not profitable but a hindrance" (*A.*, Prologue, 7).

There has been much discussion and controversy amongst theologians in recent years as to whether all Christians are called to Contemplation, and as to whether the mystical state is the normal end of the Christian life. Without going into details which would be beyond the purpose of this book, it would seem that nearly all, if not all of those who have contributed to this discussion have curiously failed to notice some points in St. John's doctrine which throw light upon the whole subject. There is, for instance, the fact we have already drawn attention to as being of great importance toward the understanding of the Saint's writings, that is, that the end he has in view is not the final sight and enjoyment of the Beatific Vision in heaven but that near yet incomplete approach to it which is the soul's union with God in the Spiritual Marriage in this life. No one would deny that all Christians are called to perfection, to the sight of God in heaven, or that any lesser goal could be rightly set before the mind. But no one, on the other hand, could or ought to assert that all Christians are even called, much less raised to (the distinction is St. John's and is important, since the latter is the act of God alone), the highest degrees of contemplation in the Night of Spirit or to that of the highest perfection possible in this life. To do so would be to confuse sanctity with Contemplation, which neither the Church nor the Saints have ever done. It is, too, to forget or ignore the fact, to be considered later, that although there is but one contemplation, as St. John teaches, it has many forms and degrees, of which some souls may have the elementary,

others the more advanced, and some the most perfect. But it does not necessarily follow that one who attains to the first degrees will advance to the more perfect in this life, for this depends both on the will of God and on the soul's response to it. Further, insufficient attention seems to have been given to the Saint's teaching, which is also that of St. Catherine of Genoa, Tauler and St. Vincent Ferrer, concerning the intimate likeness between and the effect caused by the Dark Night of the Spirit and Purgatory. The Night of Sense, it will be remembered, he says, "is common and comes to many . . . the Night of the Spirit is the portion of very few" (*D.N.* I, viii, 1; cf. xiv, 1). The Night of the Spirit comes of the direct meeting together of two extremes, the Divine and the human, the Divine being the gift of Contemplation in its highest form and function, first as a purifying operation from which suffering and pain result in the soul (*D.N.* II, vi, 1), and second, of an illumination perfecting the soul. It is a state and process in which God works in the soul and in which it can do nothing for itself (*ibid.* II, viii, 1). It is Purgatory here and now, for "as the spirits are purged in the next life with dark material fire, in this they are purged and cleansed with the dark, loving spiritual fire" (*D.N.* II, xii, 1). The reason for the many trials and penances through which the soul must pass to Divine union is that those which are of the sensible part purify and refine the soul, whilst trials, temptations, darknesses and dangers refine and prepare the spirit, so that the soul needs to pass through them in order to come to transformation in God, "even as those who beyond the grave must, by means of Purgatory, some with more intensity, others with less, some enduring longer and others shorter time, according to the degrees of union to which it has pleased God to raise them" (*L.F.* ii, 21). And of those who reach the tenth and last rung of the secret ladder of love "which is beyond this life," he says, "these, who are few, enter not into purgatory, for they have already been purged by love" (*D.N.* II, xx, 5).

It is possible, then, for a soul to have its purgatory in this

life, but few desire or are able to so endure this, and such must pass through the Dark Night of purgatory hereafter. Such passage, St. John teaches, is essential to every soul, but he does not say that it is essential *in this life*, even if to some degree or another it begins here. It is only essential in its fulness here to the attainment of the Spiritual Marriage and is caused by the gift of mystical contemplation, which is not necessary to eternal salvation. St. John, it should be remarked, uses the term Contemplation in a much more restricted sense than in many preceding and formally theological writers and it is in that sense to be defined later, that we refer to it here. The one thing upon which the salvation of the soul depends is Charity, the love of the will for God and our neighbour in God. St. John repeatedly insists upon this ; after quoting the first great commandment he says, " In which is contained all that the spiritual man ought to do and all that I have to teach him here, in order that he may truly attain to God through union of will by means of charity " (A. III, xvi, 1). " Love is the inclination of the soul, the strength and power by which it goes to God, for by means of love the soul is united to God " (L.F. i, 13). " At eventide they will examine thee in love " (Maxim 57). And the common teaching of the Church is well summed up by St. John Cajetan, " The perfection of charity is commanded as an end, and it is necessary to will to attain the end in its fulness ; but precisely because it is an end, it is sufficient, in order to fulfil the precept, to be in the state which tends toward that end, which is in eternity. Whosoever possesses charity, even in the smallest degree and so walks towards heaven, is in the way of perfect charity, and so does not transgress the precept, which is necessary to salvation." With this must be noted that St. John speaks of degrees of union, " Although it is true that a soul, according to its greater or smaller capacity, may have attained to union, yet not all do so in an equal degree, for this is as the Lord wills to give to each one. It is so that souls see Him in heaven ; some more fully, some less ; but all see God and are content, since the capacity of each is satisfied " (A. II, v, 10)

A soul, then, by passing through the Dark Nights of Sense and Spirit, has its Purgatory in this life and passes from the union of the Spiritual Marriage to that of the unveiled vision of God in Heaven, whilst the soul who, for one reason or another, though loving God has not endured the purgation of the Nights in their fulness, attains to heaven only through the purgatorial state after death. And as the actual state of the soul in eternity depends upon the degree of union attained in this life, this will be of higher or lower degree one star differing from another star in glory, as says the Apostle. Yet since each one will possess all the fulness of the Vision of God, of which it is capable, each will be perfectly fulfilled and satisfied, not knowing, as it were, that there is anything lacking to it and so entirely happy and content in what it possesses.

Nor must it be forgotten that St. John distinctly teaches that the gift of Contemplation is not won by the soul but is purely given by God to whom He wills. All souls are indeed called to perfection, which, as we have seen, is a relative term, but to be called is not necessarily to be raised to the Contemplative and Mystic *state* (as habitual, not occasional), which is only granted to a comparatively small number. The Saint's definite pronouncement upon this has often been misquoted, as if he had said that not many are called to Contemplation. What he does say is that God leads some souls into the night of the interior senses, in which at times they find it impossible to exercise the rational faculties in meditation, and suffer from periods of great aridity, which, however, are not continuous, "sometimes they have them, sometimes not ; and at times they cannot meditate, at other times they can." This being due to the fact that God is beginning to communicate Himself to the soul "in an act of simple contemplation" which forbids the operation of the senses of the lower part of the soul, but is only an "act" not a continuously operative habit, which comes and goes. But God "sets them in this Night only to exercise and humble them and to reform their desires, so that they may not go on indulging a sinful greediness in spiritual things"

(that is, loving them for the sensible pleasure they experience in them), "and not that He may raise them to the way of the spirit, which is this contemplation ; for not all those who purposely walk in the spiritual way does God raise (*eleva*) to contemplation—nor even half of them—the reason, He Himself knows (*el por qué, él se lo sabe*)" (*D.N.* I, ix, 8, 9).

Account must also be taken not only of the capacity of each soul but of the various conditions and circumstances in which God has willed to place them. There is a certain likeness between the natural, physical life and the spiritual life. A man, for instance, may have a great desire to climb mountains, but may be prevented from getting very high, or from climbing at all by circumstances over which he has practically no control. He may be prevented by bodily conditions, by having gained the desire too late in life, by not being able to afford the money or time required, so that however great his desire, he cannot fulfil it. It is possible that some of these handicaps might be removed ; he might, for instance, be left sufficient means to enable him to realize his desire, but unless some aid external to himself is given, he can do nothing himself toward attaining his wish. Now, without saying that anyone, in any condition or circumstance of life cannot, owing to those conditions and circumstances, attain by the gift of God to the Contemplative and Mystic state, which would be untrue, it is sufficiently obvious that the majority of souls live under conditions and in circumstances which, to say the least, make it extremely improbable that they will do so. No one will deny that contemplative saints have and do come out of slums and suburbs as well as from solitudes, from the busy streets as from the cloister. But they are few, and we would claim that St. John's teaching implies that this is not always due to individual faults or a failing to respond to the will of God. In the providence of God which orders all things with suavity and wisdom the world of human society requires that men and women should be called to various states of life, vocations, occupations, each surrounded and conditioned by diverse circumstances. It also requires a great diversity of natural gifts from the

lowest to the highest, from the skill of the labourer to that of the thinker, and none of these things may be regarded as not influencing the life of the spirit. Quite obviously some men are more "apt" to spirituality than others, some to the contemplative, others to the active side of life, and it is this nature of the individual, the particular psychological thing God made each one, which is the soil into which all the gifts of grace fall, to elevate and perfect it, not to transform it into something else. And whilst it is true that the soul which as the "form" or active principle of life, determines matter to be "this" matter, this person or thing, it is also true the form is contracted and to some extent limited by the matter so determined. Thus St. Thomas says that "the disposition of the rational soul is in keeping with the disposition of the body, both because it receives something from the body, and because forms are diversified according to the differences of matter" (*de Potentia*, III, ix, A. 7) that is, the particular coarseness or delicacy of the physical organism affects the soul to a greater or less degree. A passage of Holy Scripture, which we have never seen quoted in connection with all that has just been said, bears significantly upon this subject. "The wisdom of a learned man cometh by opportunity of leisure . . . how can he get wisdom that holdeth the plough, and glorieth in the goad, that driveth oxen, and is occupied in their labours, and whose talk is of bullocks?" Or the carpenter and workmaster, the smith or the potter, all of whom "trust to their hands and every one is wise in his work?" Yet "without these a city cannot be inhabited; and they shall not dwell where they will, nor go up and down; they shall not be sought for in public counsel, nor sit high in the congregation . . . but they will maintain the state of the world, and their desire is in the work of their craft. But he that giveth his mind to the law of the most High, and is occupied in the meditation thereof . . . will keep the sayings of renowned men . . . seek out the secrets of grave sentences, . . . give his heart early to resort to the Lord that made him and pray before the most High, and will open his mouth in prayer and make supplication

for his sins. When the Lord will, he shall be filled with the spirit of understanding . . ." (Ecclus. xxxviii, 24-xxxix, 11). With this may fitly be compared the parables of the talents and the pounds, and St. Paul's teaching upon the diversity of gifts in Romans xii and 1 Corinthians xii. The controversy as to whether there is only one way of the Christian life, which normally includes and should include contemplation in all its degrees up to the consummation of the Spiritual Marriage, or whether there are two ways, usually named ascetic and mystical, by either of which the soul may journey to God, is largely determined by whether the disputants are viewing the question from St. John's standpoint of that fullest union with God that is attainable *in this life*, or from that of the perfection of union which is only attainable after this life and that only by the passage through Purgatory. Further, many of those who advance the former, one-way doctrine, seem to have in mind only religious and exceptionally pious souls living in the world under conditions favourable to contemplation, and also, are driven by the obvious facts concerning the generality of Christians to hedge their conclusion about with various expedients which largely nullify its value. Both parties to the discussion appeal to St. John, but frequently not only ignore the facts of the point of view from which he writes and to whom he principally addresses himself, but also the fact that the question debated is one which has only arisen since his time. Indeed, in an acute form only of recent years, so that it is fatally easy to extract a meaning from his words of which he was innocent. This applies also to the allied controversy upon the question of "acquired" and "infused" contemplation, which is a product of recent years, in which one side asserts whilst the other denies that St. John taught the former. The Carmelite Congress in honour of St. John, held in May, 1928, took the former view, but there is significance in the fact that another of its conclusions reads that "In place of the frequent use of the term mystical contemplation, it would be much better to speak of the action in general of the Holy Spirit in souls." We do not imply that St. John was a full

stop in mystic theology any more than St. Thomas was in dogmatic theology, but simply that in either case, consequences and implications which have come to be seen since their time, and of which they had no idea of treating, should not be forced into their doctrine. In the case of St. John, both the facts of his life and his ministry among all classes of people, and of the extreme care with which he guards and limits his teaching are sufficient to cause us to think that he would agree with Abbot Butler, who in an illuminating discussion of the subject says, "Great discussion goes on whether there be two 'unitive ways' or only one. There is much to be said for the view that there are not one or two, but many, just as there are many mansions in our Father's house." And if the Greek word translated by "mansions" means, as it seems to do, the rest-houses or "stations" on the great roads of the Empire by which the traveller made his way to the city, the reference is all the more apt. The learned Abbot later adds that, as we have said, the belief that every one is intended to attain to the higher mystical states "in such sense that the fact of not doing so always spells some initial infidelity to grace, or is to be attributed to spiritual sloth, or implies some kind of failure is, I believe, a teaching to be rejected, though it seems to be held by some of the Dominican theologians (Arintero and Garrigou-Lagrange). The life of the vast majority of the devout servants of God is cast, by virtue of the vocation in which they are called by God's Providence and Will, in conditions of this workaday world wherein the very performance of God's Will in the duties of their state renders impossible those opportunities for such prayer and recollection as are the ordinary means of attaining to grades of contemplation above that of the prayer of loving attention." The "religious sense recoils from the conclusions and implications" of the teaching that every one is bound to pass through the Night of the Spirit to the attainment of the Mystical Marriage as described by St. John (*vide Western Mysticism*, second edition, with Afterthoughts, pp. lxii, lxxxi, lxxxii). The whole of this new section to the Abbot's book contains the

best review of the controversy in English, the discussion itself being mostly found in French and Spanish books and reviews. The Carmelites themselves teach that there is an Ascetic and a Mystic Way, each with its own kind of contemplation, a theory we shall deal with more fully in chap. xvi.

Turning to the manner of the progress of the spiritual life as described by St. John, attention must be paid to his doctrine of the Nights through which the soul has to pass on its journey to God, and this in conjunction with his reference to the traditional Three Ways, Purgative, Illuminative and Unitive, and to his use of the terms, beginners, proficient and perfect which he occasionally uses in the ordinary sense but more often with a restricted meaning of his own. This attention is the more necessary since he is not strictly consistent in his enumeration of the Nights or in his use of the Ways, for whilst this does not affect his teaching it may confuse the reader. Chap. i of the first book of *The Ascent* speaks of "two principal kinds of nights which spiritual persons call purgations or purifications of the soul," and are called nights because in both the soul travels in darkness. The First Night is that in which the soul is purified in its lower or sensitive part, that is, in its exterior and interior senses in relation to the external things of the world and the operations of its desires and interior spiritual faculties, intellect memory and will, which do not operate in this life apart from the senses. *The Ascent* treats of the active side of this Night, that which the soul does aided by grace, book one being concerned with the desires in relation to external things, books two and three with the interior senses and faculties of the soul. Thus in the First Night there are two parts (cf. *A. II*, ii, 1), the first treating of the active detachment of the soul from the desires for creatures, the second of the active detachment of the interior senses and the faculties of the intellect, memory and will from the means by which the soul has hitherto journeyed to God. For "in this way, to enter into the way is to leave one's way ; or to express it more clearly, it is to forsake one's own manner

of going in order to pass to the end, it is to enter upon that which has no way, which is God " (A. II, iv, 5).

The Second Night is that of the Passive purification of the Spirit, which is treated in the second book of *The Dark Night*, the previous chapters of the first book having dealt further with the First Night, and its effects, together with the causes which demand the entry into this Night of the Spirit. But, as we have said, St. John is not quite consistent in his division of the nights, for having spoken of "two principal kinds" he goes on to speak as if they were three, of the sensitive part of the soul, the spiritual or intellectual part, and the spirit, the substance or highest point of the soul, adding that "these three parts of the night are all one night, but like the night itself, it has three parts," the first like the twilight when things begin to fade from sight, the second like the total darkness of midnight, and the third like to the dawn. Here, the division is of the Night of Sense, in which the soul begins its journey toward God by actively detaching its desires from creatures; the Night of Faith, in which it detaches itself from all knowledge gained through the active operation of the spiritual faculty of the intellect, and of the activity of the memory and will; the Night of the Spirit, in which the inmost nature of the soul is purified and illumined, and the whole being of man unified by the direct operation of God Himself acting upon the soul which has entirely submitted itself to His Will and work, so that, like the souls in Purgatory it does nothing of itself but wills to be passive in the hand of God. To this Third Night "in which the soul entirely recognizes the communication of God in the spirit . . . succeeds its union with the Spouse, which is the Wisdom of God."

In a later chapter of *The Ascent* there occurs a passage which serves to give some idea of how these two divisions of the Nights were reconciled in the Saint's mind. Speaking of the Night of the purification of the spiritual part of the soul, that is, the faculties of the intellect, memory and will, by the activity of the soul itself, he says, "And even as, in the night of the senses we gave a method of emptying the

sensitive powers of their sensible objects, according to the desire of the appetite, so that the soul might go forth from *its beginning to the middle, which is faith*; so in this spiritual night, by the favour of God we shall give a method whereby the spiritual powers are emptied and purified of all that is not God" (A. II, vi, 6). Here, the Night of Faith is regarded not as a distinct night, but as a transition, a middle step between the Night of Sense and that of Spirit, so that we get back to the primary division into two Nights, with that of faith as a passage from one to the other, as the darkness of midnight may be regarded as a passage from eventide to dawn.

With this division of the Nights we must also take into consideration the reference St. John makes to the Three Ways in the *Argument* which appears in the second version of *The Spiritual Canticle*, which we shall assume, with Padre Silverio de Santa Teresa, author of the critical edition of St. John's works, and with other authorities, as against M. Baruzi and Dom Chevallier, to be most probably the amended and definitive text, which agrees more perfectly than the first version with the general plan of the Saint's teaching, the first being simply the *borrador* or rough copy of which the second is the completed version. (*Vide* the two versions of the *Cántico Espiritual*, by Inez Macdonald, in "The Modern Language Review," April, 1930, also the abridgement of P. Silverio's defence of the authenticity of the second version as given by Professor Peers in the introduction to vol. ii of his translation.)

St. John speaks of the Three Ways in the traditional terms as Purgative, Illuminative and Unitive, but his explanation of them does not strictly agree with the commonly received one, nor does he make them correspond exactly with the Three Nights. [According to him, the Purgative way embraces the Night of the Sense and the Night of Faith, the Illuminative extends from the Night of Spirit to the Spiritual Betrothal, the Unitive is that in which is consummated the Spiritual Marriage (for the traditional interpretation, see Appendix).] In the *Argument* and in the

Annotation to the first stanza of *The Spiritual Canticle*, he makes the term "beginners" cover the whole of the Purgative way, that is the first two of the Three Nights, whilst in *The Ascent* he confines the term more closely to the time when those who have passed through the Night of the Senses are being brought by God into the state of contemplation (cf. A. I, i, 3 ; II, vi, 8). Also in some places he calls them beginners and in others progressors or proficient. Several explanations of this apparent contradiction have been advanced, the most probable of which is that from the point of view of their entry into the Night of Faith they are beginners, whilst from that of their going out of it they are proficient, or to put it in another way they may be regarded as beginners in relation to the elementary state they are brought out of by God, and as proficient in relation to the end to which they make their way. Or they are beginners so far as this Night of Faith is concerned, but proficient in the things of that from which they are now led.

Returning to the Two Nights, as St. John speaks of them in the first chapter of *The Ascent*, we come to his announcement that in *The Ascent* the purgation of both the sensitive and spiritual powers of the soul will be treated in relation to the activity of the soul, and in *The Dark Night* (to which he refers as "the fourth part") in relation to its passivity. This gives rise to the question, which has been much disputed, as to whether these simply succeed one to another, as two sections of a road, or whether there is a point at which the Passive begins to overlap the Active, and increasing in intensity finally eliminates all the activity of the soul. A similar question besets the doctrine of the Three Ways, and the conclusion we have reached in the latter (see Appendix), helps to solve the former. Indeed, St. John would seem to have stated the solution himself, in the answer he gives to the objection he foresees may be made that the detachment of the memory from all forms and phantasies which he requires is so difficult that it is beyond the strength and ability of human nature. It is to be remembered that the objection is made by a soul in a state of grace, so that, even so, the

task is regarded as impossible. St. John answers that, indeed, it is impossible, and adds, " the truth is that God must place the soul in this supernatural state ; but the soul, so far as is possible to it, must be disposing itself, and this it is able to do naturally, especially with the aid that God is always giving it. Thus as the soul, of its own part, enters into the negation and self-emptying of forms, God places it in the possession of union, and this God works passively in the soul, as we shall say, *Deo dante* in treating of the passive night of the soul. So, when God is pleased, and according to the manner of the soul's disposition, He will give it the habit of perfect Divine union. And of the Divine effects which are caused in the soul when this is so, both on the part of the intellect as of the memory and the will, we shall not speak in dealing here with this night of active purgation, because by this alone the soul does not come to Divine union ; but we shall speak of them in treating of the passive night " (A. III, ii, 13, 14). Here we see that the operation of the Passive Night does not await the end of the soul's activity but begins to work *as the soul disposes itself* by its own activity aided by grace to receive that operation. The two activities (for this passivity is the highest form of activity), then, do not follow one upon or after the other, but at a certain undefinable point of the soul's progress, the passive sweeps down and enters into the active, becoming more and more dominant until the Divine union ensues.

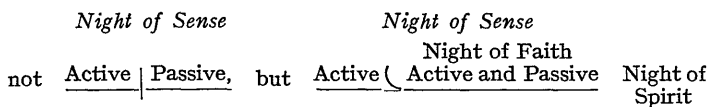
A passage in *The Dark Night* confirms this view of the simultaneous character of the operation of the Active and Passive Nights. " When God sets the soul in this night of sense in order to purge the sense of its lower part and subject, unite and conform it to the spirit, placing it in darkness, and causing it to cease from discursive meditation, as He does later that He may purify the spirit in order to unite it with God, as we shall say, He places it in the night of the spirit, in which the soul gains so many benefits (although it does not perceive this) that it holds it a happy chance to have gone out of the entanglements and limitations of the senses of its lower self by means of this night " (*D.N.* I, xi, 3).

And in a later passage which introduces the full Night of the Spirit, he speaks of that intermediate period between the cessation of meditation as a normal practice and the Night of the Spirit, already discussed from the active side in *The Ascent*, describing it as "the gate and beginning of contemplation which leads to the purgation of the spirit," the Night of Sense having been intended "rather to accommodate sense to spirit than to unite the spirit to God" (*D.N.* II, ii, 1). In this state, he teaches, the soul may pass many years, indeed, God may not intend to raise it to the Night of the Spirit. Nevertheless, that which is done within it is no longer altogether of its own activity aided by grace; it walks in a new freedom, for "its imagination and faculties are no longer bound to meditation and spiritual anxiety as before, since it now easily finds in its spirit the most serene and loving contemplation and spiritual sweetness without the labour of meditation; although, as the purgation of the soul is not fully complete (because it is wanting in the principal part, that is, the spirit, without which, because of the communication which exists between one part and the other, since the subject [i.e. human nature] is one being, the purgation of sense, however strong it may have been, is not yet complete and perfect), it never fails to experience times of necessities, aridities, darknesses and dangers, at times much more intensely than those of the past, which are as presages and heralds of the coming night of the spirit, yet are not lasting, as will be the night which is to come" (*D.N.* II, i, 1). Of this contrast between meditation and contemplation, the coming in of which stops the possibility of meditation, the Saint has already said that those who find themselves in this state must "remain in attention and loving waiting upon God in quietude, and not give any regard to the imagination or to its working, for here, as we say, the powers (of the soul) are at rest, and are working, *not actively, but passively, by receiving* that which God works in them" (*A.* II, xii, 8; cf. II, vi, 6, 8).

Some care, the reader of St. John must note, is required to distinguish between his references to the Second Night,

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specifically that of the spirit itself, and to the second part of the Night of Sense which he frequently calls "the night of spirit," meaning, of the spiritual faculties. Expressed in diagrammatic form, the process is



The operation of the Passive side of the Night of Sense begins in the second part of that Night, also called the Night of Faith or of the spiritual senses and faculties, active and passive here being conjoined, with the result that the former is absorbed and taken up (not destroyed) by the latter, and finally merges into the Night of Spirit.

The reasons why the two are treated separately are that, beside the difficulty of dealing with them together, there is no fixed point or time in the spiritual life in which they coalesce and concur, this depending both upon the Will of God and the soul's dispositions, and also, perhaps, because St. John wished to emphasize clearly the necessity of the soul's doing everything possible to it, thus avoiding the errors of the Illuminists, as well as insisting upon the ascetic preparation for the reception of the mystic graces.

This conclusion is supported by the fact that both the doctrine of *The Ascent* and *The Dark Night* are interpretations and expansions of the same poem, which would confirm the supposition that they deal with the same subject, not successively but from a different point of view, one becoming at a certain point contemporaneous with the other. And this is much more agreeable to the spiritual character of the whole operation, active or passive, which is in its essence of the supernatural, timeless order, and is not to be estimated or measured by the analogies and similitudes by which something of its truth is conveyed to the mind. None of the terms so used, journey, road, way, etc., mean exactly the same as when used of an earthly journey, road or way, they have to be translated into spiritual activities; we do not walk to God by

the movement of the feet, as Augustine says, but by the direction of our minds. St. John explains, and refers repeatedly to his explanation, the reasons why the journey of the soul to union with God is called night. The first is that to enter upon this journey, the soul must gradually rid itself of desire for all the worldly things it possesses, by renunciation and self-denial which is as a night to the senses, since it is the deprivation of the taste and delight which is of the desire for these things. For the soul can receive nothing save by means of the senses, so that when it denies its desire of taking pleasure in that which gives pleasure to any one and all of the senses "we can well say that it remains, as it were, dark and empty." It is true that it cannot help seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching, but this does not matter, for if it denies and renounces the desire of delighting in things, it is no more hindered than if it saw, heard, etc., them not, even as a man who shuts his eyes is as a blind man who has not the sense of sight. Thus David says, "I am poor and in labours from my youth up," calling himself poor, although he had great riches, because his will was not set upon them. For the detachment which occasions the Night of Sense does not consist of the lack of things but of the freeing oneself from the desire for and attachment to them (*A. I. ii, 1, 3*).

The second reason is that beyond the first part of the Night of Sense is that of faith, which is darkness to the intellect, since its light is so great that it blinds the natural faculties in something of the manner in which a too great light, as when one goes out of a dark room into blazing sunlight, causes a temporary darkening of the sight (*A. I. ii, 1 ; II, iii, 1*).

The third reason is that God—to whom the soul travels—is dark night to the soul in this life. In the previous Night of Faith, God "communicates Himself to the soul so secretly and intimately that He is as another night to the soul, inasmuch as this said communication is much darker than those others" for the Night of Faith ushers the soul into that of the spirit, the darkest hour before the dawn, in which it comes to the full and loving knowledge "of the communication of

God in the spirit," the last step in this life to the perfect transformation of the soul in love (A. I, ii, 4, 5).

Through these nights, then, the soul passes on its way to Divine union in such manner and to such degree of union in this life as God wills. We must now see what St. John means by union with God and what he teaches about the diversity of manner and degree in which that union is attained, the relation between the Divine and human will and the true meaning of the "passivity" of the soul in the mystic state.

(1) The union of the soul with God is of a threefold nature. There is first and in every soul, "even in that of the greatest sinner in the world," that substantial and essential union produced by the ever creative act of God, who dwells in the soul as in all creatures by His essence, presence and power, preserving it in being, "so that if this manner of union were to fail them, they would instantly be annihilated and cease to exist." Second, there is the union by grace accomplished by God in Baptism wherein man is made partaker of the Divine nature, i.e. of the Divine life and activity, and raised to a supernatural state which is the preparation for the Beatific Vision of God in heaven. St. John assumes, but is not primarily concerned with these two states of union, and reserves the term "supernatural" for the perfection of the second state, which we have made the third, and which consists of the union of the human mind and will with the mind and will of God. "When we speak of union of the soul with God, we do not speak of this substantial union which is always being accomplished; but of the union and transformation of the soul with God, which is not always being accomplished, but only when there is a likeness of love . . . which is when the two wills, that of the soul and that of God, are conformed together in one, the one having nothing which is repugnant to the other. . . . For although it is true that, as we have said, God always dwells in the soul, giving and preserving its natural being by His power, yet He does not always give it supernatural being. For this is only communicated by love and grace, which are not possessed by all souls; nor do those who possess

it do so in the same degree" (A. II, v, 1-4). We have said that a great part of St. John's mission is to convert Christians to Christianity, and we are here shown what that implies. There are numerous signs in his works of the fact that in his day, as in our own, large numbers of Christians entirely failed to realize that anything more was expected of them than that they should be in a "state of grace," that is, free from mortal sin, and fulfil the common obligations defined in the precepts of the Church. The whole New Testament and Catholic conception of the Christian life as a progress toward perfection, a putting on of the Mind of Christ, a growing up into Christ, a conforming of the mind and will to the Divine mind and will, all this was practically ignored, or if thought of at all, looked upon as the business of religious and "pious" folk. It was—and is—a minimum religion, consisting of a greater or less adherence to various practices, some of which, as we shall see, St. John uses very plain words about, since good as any of them may be in their place, they, and indeed, all the practices of religion are only of value as they aid that union of the soul with God, the union of mind and will, which the whole of the Christian religion exists to proclaim and enable. It is not, as some moderns have imagined, because the saints were contemptuous of, or thought that there was an esoteric stage in which the common things of the faith were to be neglected that we read so little of these things in their writings. They were not pre-Protestants who merely conformed to common Catholic obligations for the sake of others or because of some remaining shreds of superstition. St. John's devotion to Mass and the Sacraments, to our Lady and the Saints, to holy things and practices aroused the admiration of his contemporaries, and was what it was precisely because he saw them in their place, knew and desired the end for which they existed, knew no less the need of detachment in relation to them as to all that which was not God Himself. The things of religion were seen by him as those which were designed to bind, not his sentiments and feelings, but the highest faculties of his soul to God, things having the power to convey the purifying and

illuminating streams of truth and grace to intellect and will in which lay the capacity for that reception of God Himself by which he might be entirely conformed to Him. No one has ever more completely exposed the emptiness of that emotional slush of the feelings which runs riot to-day under the name of Christianity than he does, especially in the early chapters of *The Dark Night*, no one comes nearer to his master in theology, St. Thomas, in showing that a "spirituality" which is not rooted in the mind, is the most dangerous of delusions, and that the one test of Christian belief and practice is laid down in our Lord's words, "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who doeth the will of My Father who is in heaven."

(2) Union with God, then, means in St. John, the total transformation of the soul with all its faculties from its unlikeness to likeness with God. But this must not be taken to imply, despite the language in which this union is described, such an absorption of the human in the Divine as would involve the loss of that creaturely, personal, individual nature which for ever distinguishes man from God. There is nothing of the East in St. John except a certain similarity of language by which some of his critics have been led to ignore the positive statements which are embedded in it, and which acquit him of the charges they bring against his teaching as being virtually Pantheistic or Buddhist in character. For if he says "that all the things of God and the soul are one in participant transformation; and the soul seems to be God, rather than a soul, and is indeed God by participation"; he goes on, "although it is true that its natural being, although so transformed, *is as distinct from the Being of God as before*" (A. II, v, 7). Again, in *The Dark Night*, we read that even in the Beatific Vision of God in heaven, when the soul has become "wholly assimilated to God," this will not be because "the soul will come to have the capacity of God, *for this is impossible*" (II, xx, 5); and in *The Spiritual Canticle*, "even as in the consummation of marriage according to the flesh, the two become one flesh, as says the Divine

Scripture, so when this Spiritual Marriage between God and the soul is consummated there are two natures in one spirit and love of God . . . wherein is effected such union of the two natures and such communication of the Divine nature to the human that, *while neither of them changes its being*, each of them appears to be God " (xxvii, 2, 3). The distinction is also made plain when in speaking of the soul's love for God " as much as she is loved by Him," he adds, " I do not mean that she will love God as much as He loves Himself, for this cannot be " (S.C. xxxvii, 3), and in the following chapter, commenting upon our Lord's words, " I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be perfect in one ; that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou has loved Me " ; " that is, by communicating to them the same love as to the Son, *though not naturally* as to the Son but, as we have said, by unity and transformation of love. Neither is it to be understood here that the Son means to say to the Father that the Saints are to be one thing *essentially and naturally*, as are the Father and the Son ; but that they may be so by union of love, as are the Father and Son in unity of love." Finally, in *The Living Flame*, the Saint explains that in the Spiritual Marriage, " all the movements and operations which the soul had aforetime, as belonging to the principle of its natural life, are now in this union changed into movements of God . . . and the substance of the soul, although it is *not the Substance of God, for into this it cannot be changed*, is nevertheless united and absorbed in Him and is thus God by participation in God " (ii, 30).

(3) Following St. Thomas the Saint makes it clear that whilst the intellect is the highest faculty of the soul, since it is by it, aided by faith, that the soul apprehends God in this life and sees Him in the *Lumen Gloriæ* in heaven, yet on earth the will plays a foremost part, since it lays hold of that which the mind perceives by an act of love which on earth is of more value than an act of knowledge as completing and perfecting it. So St. John says, " The state of this Divine union consists in holding the soul according to the will with

total transformation in the will of God, in such a manner that there may be nothing in it which is contrary to the will of God, but that in all and through all its movement may be solely that of God " (A. I, xi, 2). Hence, in the height of the mystic state all is the work of God, " for the soul can do nothing of itself, except through and by the aid of the bodily senses, from which in this case the soul is very free and far removed, its only occupation being the receiving of God, who alone can work within the depth of the soul, without the aid of the senses, and can move the soul in that which it does. Thus, all the movements of such a soul are Divine, yet, although they are of God, *they belong to the soul* also, for God works them in the soul, *with its own aid*, since it gives its will and consent to them " (L.F. i, 9).

We touch here the question, much debated by the theologians, of the relation between the Divine and the human will. If God wills all that is done by the soul, how can the human will be said to be free and its acts be truly its own for which it is responsible? Not even in the mystic state can it be allowed that man loses the inherent freedom of choice, for this would result in a lessening rather than a perfecting of his nature. St. John in the above quotation answers the question in the Thomistic manner. A distinction is to be made between the First Cause and Reason of all acts and those secondary, natural and voluntary causes which operate in creatures. The necessary and initial Mover in all cases is God, without whom there would be no secondary causes or movement. " And just as by imparting movement to natural causes He does not prevent their acts from being according to their nature, so in moving voluntary causes He does not deprive them of their voluntary character, rather, He is the cause of this voluntary character they possess, since He acts in each thing according to the nature He has conferred upon it " (S.T. I, lxxxiii, 1). Thus, God, as First Cause of all things, enables our will to choose freely, so that its choice is its own activity as of a secondary cause. God does not determine in the sense of compelling our choices, He enables the will to determine itself with

freedom, so that in all our willing we are using that which, whilst it is within our own power to use, is only so by the gift of God. And this freedom of choice is enhanced in the degree that the will chooses that which is conformed to the will of God, for so it is freed from that dependence upon and servitude to creatures which, in reality, hinders its freedom, a well-known fact which St. John emphasizes in the early chapters of *The Ascent*, which deal with detachment from desires, and in the later passage of the same work. "The strength of the soul consists in its faculties, passions and appetites; all of which are governed by the will. Now when these faculties, passions and appetites are directed by the will toward God, and turned from all that is not God, then the force of the soul is kept for God, and so comes to love God with all its strength." The passions of the soul are joy, hope, grief and fear, and "wheresoever one of these passions is directed, there also goes the whole soul and the will and other faculties, and they all live captive to this passion, with the other three passions also, afflicting the soul with their bonds, and not allowing it to fly upward to the liberty and rest of sweet contemplation and union" (A. III, xvi, 2, 6).

The true freedom of the soul is not to be found in the seeking of its independence but in understanding the fact of its dependence; submission to, not rebellion against, the Divine order is the only path to the "glorious liberty of the children of God." Man by the very constitution of his nature is a dependent and a servant, and only by choosing to become the servant of God may he escape from the slavery of things and of self. The more we read St. John, the more we become conscious that what may have sounded at first as extreme and exaggerated is no more than sober, Christian common sense which, indeed, is shown to be so by the spectacle of human lives in the world about us. The greatest witnesses to its truth are those who live in the denial of it.

(4) But, it may be urged, does not St. John teach a passivity of the soul which sounds more like that of an

Eastern adept, wrapped in a self-induced state of physical and mental immobility, rather than that of the immense activity which is manifested by the Saints, and not least, by the great contemplatives of the Church? In answer it must be noted that the passivity of the soul of which the Saint speaks is of a totally different character to that of the Eastern mystics or of the Illuminists and Quietists of St. John's day or the pseudo-mystics of to-day. Far from being passive in the sense of "doing nothing," willing and desiring nothing, it is the highest activity of which the soul is capable, the deliberate and sustained effort of the soul to suffer, in the sense of allow, all that God may will to effect in it. Of those who have just come into the Night of Faith, the Saint says, "here the faculties are at rest, *and are working*, not actively, but passively, by receiving that which God operates in them" (A. II, xii, 8). And again, "We say that the soul does not work, not because it does not understand, but because that which it understands is not result of its own industry, but is a receiving of that which is given to it" (*ibid.* II, xv, 2). But this does not mean that the soul places itself in or attains to this state of itself, for this would be to open itself, not to God but the devil. The soul exerts its activity to free itself from whatever may hinder the free operation of God, but it is God Himself who initiates, enables and brings about the soul's freedom. The maximum of the positive, grace-aided activity of the soul is not directed to bringing about an empty inactivity, but the fullest activity of which it is capable, that in which the whole being harmonized and united in one act of desiring love is capable of God. And it is out of this simplified act of contemplation and union at its highest that springs the vast activity of the Saints, that richest fruit of the Mystical Marriage, that activity which, as in the case of St. John, triumphs over time and flows in an ever-widening stream throughout the ages.

It is true that, as with the whole of the spiritual life, the soul moves by successive steps toward that finality of passive union, and that in the earlier stages there is a passivity which to more or less degree reduces the soul to periods of

inactivity, one might almost say stupidity, due to the powerful operation of God, from which source also arises many of the physical phenomena which mark certain periods in the lives of some of the Saints, but which are not an essential feature or any necessary index of the mystic state. Regarding the former, St. John, dealing with the period which immediately succeeds upon the cessation of meditation in which the soul enters the Night of Faith, says that the Divine light of contemplation does not always shine with the same force upon the soul, and that in times when it is less powerful the soul "neither perceives darkness nor sees light, nor apprehends anything that it knows from any source; and, by reason of this the soul remains at times as in a great forgetfulness, neither knowing where it has been, nor what it has been doing nor has it perceived the passage of time. . . . The cause of this forgetfulness is the purity and simplicity of this knowledge which occupies the soul" by which "it is united in pure intelligence, which is not of time . . . wherein it knows God, only without knowing how." And this forgetfulness is not of necessity but only takes place "when God withdraws the soul from the exercise of all its faculties, natural and spiritual, upon sensible things, which is infrequently the case, since this knowledge does not always occupy the whole soul" (*A. II, xiv, 11, 12*).

Again, in treating of the active purgation of the memory and imagination, he says that "sometimes, when God causes these touches of union in the memory, the brain in which memory has its place is suddenly and so sensibly upset, that it seems to be affected with a certain giddiness, and to lose its judgment and sense . . . and remains in oblivion, at times completely, so that great force and labour is necessary for it to remember anything." The reason for this is that in this beginning of the contemplative state, in which the active and passive nights combine, the soul is yet frail and weak so that the Divine communication paralyses, as it were, the operation of the faculties, suspends the activity of the intellect and memory at times, so that the soul falls into much forgetfulness concerning ordinary things, as eating and

drinking, remembering what it has seen or done or heard, as may be frequently noted in persons whose mind is engaged in some absorbing train of thought. But this is only a passing stage, for "when the soul attains to the habit of union which is its supreme good, it will no longer experience such forgetfulness in that which is of the natural and moral reason ; but will perform all fitting and necessary actions with a much greater perfection," since all its natural operations will be perfected in union with God, and moved by Him will act as is necessary and befitting to each one's condition and vocation (*A. III, ii, 5-9*).

As to the various phenomena of a physical nature such as ecstasy, raptures, trances and the like, St. John anticipates the general judgment of later experts in the mystic sphere, that these are caused by the overflowing of the spiritual effects of contemplation into the sensitive part of the soul, which in this early period "is weak and incapable of bearing the strong things of the spirit," so that those who have but lately entered the way of proficients may suffer many bodily illnesses, "and in consequence are much fatigued in spirit, for, as says the Wise Man : The corruptible body presseth down the soul." So also "come raptures and trances and dislocations of the bones which always come to pass when the communications are not purely spiritual ; that is, given to the spirit alone as is the case with the perfect, already purified by the second night of the spirit, in whom these raptures and torments of the body cease, because they are enjoying liberty of spirit, without clouding or transport of the senses " (*D.N. II, i, 2*). In the case of St. Teresa we know that such physical phenomena, from which she suffered many years, ceased, except for one brief period, when they were probably caused by the external trials she was enduring, from the time she attained to the Spiritual Marriage, and this seems to be the normal case.

One further point deserves notice before we pass to St. John's description of the soul's journey from self to God, that is, the reason why the purification of the soul, whether perfected in this life or in Purgatory, must be of so drastic

a nature as to involve not simply the Night of the Senses and that of Faith but the Passive Night of the Spirit.

St. John's answer goes to the root of the matter. "The reason is that all the imperfections and disorders of the sensitive part of the soul have their strength and root in the spirit wherein all habits, good or bad, are subjected, and thus until these are purged the rebellions and depravities of the senses cannot be entirely purged" (*D.N.* II, iii, 1). To be content with the active purification of the senses is to be as one who thinks to clear the garden of weeds by cutting off the tops which appear above the earth. But it is the roots that matter, and in man the roots of sin and imperfections go deeper than is often thought, so that even the most vigilant care to stem their growth will be of little use if they are not attacked and rooted out at their source in the spirit. And this is beyond the power of the soul, there is a limit to what it can do even aided by grace, a point to which only God can reach and alone can operate that thorough purification and illuminating union which is the work of the Night of the Spirit.

(2) *The Night of Sense*

AS he tells us in the Prologue to *The Ascent*, St. John is mainly concerned with leading souls through what may well be called the most critical stage in the spiritual life, that is, when having entered into the Night of Sense and become habituated in Christian practice, they are in danger of losing their way or of turning back because they have not sufficient desire to follow our Lord whither He would conduct them, or because they do not understand and have no one to teach them how to go on. But he does not ignore the beginnings of the Christian life; on the contrary, his teaching upon the most important elements in the early stages is of the greatest value, and goes far to counteract errors even more prevalent to-day than when he wrote. The fact that this teaching, except that which concerns the subject of detachment, does not occupy a formal and ordered place in the Saint's writings, but is interpolated in various parts of *The Ascent*, *The Dark Night* and *The Spiritual Canticle*, and there overshadowed by his main subject, no doubt furnishes a reason for its having been regarded as almost non-existent. We shall endeavour, therefore, to set it in order, treating in this chapter of the description St. John gives of the soul's progress from the time of its "second conversion" to its arrival at the entrance of the Night of Faith, the second half of the Night of Sense.

In the *Argument* which introduces the second version of *The Spiritual Canticle*, St. John writes that the order of the stanzas of the poem there commented on and interpreted, "is from the time when a soul begins to serve God until it arrives at the ultimate state of perfection, which is the spiritual marriage," and concerns "the three states or ways of spiritual exercise, purgative, illuminative and unitive by which the soul passes to the aforesaid state." The *Annotation* which follows describes the considerations of a soul

arriving at what is commonly called the "second conversion," that is, the moment it is awakened to the sense of its position and responsibility and of what the service of God implies, and determines to respond wholeheartedly to His call to perfection. "The soul, bethinking herself of that which she ought to do, seeing that life is short, narrow the path of life eternal, that the just man is scarcely saved, that the things of this world are vain and deceitful, that everything comes to an end and fails like running water, that time is uncertain, the account strict, perdition very easy, salvation most difficult; knowing, on the other hand, the great debt she owes to God for having created her for Himself alone, for which she owes Him the service of her whole life, and for having redeemed her for Himself alone, for which she owes Him all the rest and the loving friendship of her will, and for a thousand other benefits for which she knows herself to have been indebted to God since before her birth; and that a great part of her life has vanished in the air, and that for all this she must give an account and reason, as of the first so of the last, unto the uttermost farthing, when God shall search Jerusalem with lighted candles; that it is late, even perchance, the end of the day; in order to remedy so much evil and harm, the more so as she feels God to be very far away and hidden, because she has willed to forget Him so much among the creatures, she is touched with fear and interior sorrow of heart at so great perdition and peril, and renouncing all things and delaying not for a day nor an hour, with yearnings and sighing of heart, wounded by love of God, she begins to invoke her Beloved."

It may, we think, be suggested that the above is an echo of the teaching St. John was accustomed to give in his ministrations to the peasants around Duruelo and to the townspeople of Granada, where he not only directed religious, but preached to and confessed all classes of people. He knew how to meet souls on their own level, knew also, and in this lay his power, to point them from whatever state he found them in, directly to God, who had created and redeemed them for Himself alone. Faithful steward of the

things of God, he could bring out of the treasure-house of Divine wisdom " things new and old " ; fully conscious, too, that the seed of the heavenly Word must be carefully sown with due regard to the soil in which it was cast. His doctrine was one but must be given in God's way, who orders all things in sweetness (Wis. viii, 1), and moves all things according to their nature. Thus since the soul can acquire nothing except through the senses, and " the two extremes, the human and Divine, sense and spirit, cannot in the ordinary way combine and unite in one single act, without the intervention of many other preparatory acts which combine in order and suavity among themselves, and form a basis and disposition for the rest, as in the order of natural agents ; so that the first serve the second, and the second the third, and so on, neither more nor less. So God acts, perfecting man according to his nature, after man's own manner, working from the lowest and most exterior to the highest and most interior. He begins, then, by perfecting the bodily senses, moving a man to make use of good, perfect, natural objects of the exterior order, such as hearing sermons, masses, looking at holy things, mortifying appetite at meals and chastening the sense of touch in penitence and holy self-denial." So with regard to the mind which as it receives all its knowledge through the senses and through the forms and ideas of created things, God " first raises it by instructing it through forms, images and ways of sense perception according to its own manner of understanding, now naturally, now supernaturally, perfecting and habituating also the interior bodily senses such as imagination and phantasy to the good by means of considerations, meditations and holy reflections . . . in this way instructing and spiritualizing the soul, first communicating that which is spiritual to it by means of outward and palpable things, suited to sense, according to the soul's weakness and incapacity, so that by means of the outer husk of these sensible things which in themselves are good, the spirit may continually make particular acts and receive so many morsels of spiritual communication that it may acquire a habit of spirituality and attain to the actual

substance of spirit " (A. II, xvii, 2-5). Reference to this " spiritual childhood " is also to be found in *The Dark Night*, where the Saint speaks of the fervour in which beginners perform the various exercises of the Christian life at this time when they are, " as a rule, nourished and caressed in spirit " by God, in order that they may, by tasting this goodness of God, be led on both to grow up, and in doing so, to grow out of their dependence upon the sensible consolations and fervour which may easily become a danger to them if desired and clung to when they should be left behind for the strong food of the adult spiritual life (*D.N.* I, i, 2).

In this preparatory stage, the soul must learn to submit itself to the guidance of reason illumined by the teaching of the Church. By reason, since God " desires that men should make such use of their reason as is possible . . . for in the ordinary way He neither does nor speaks anything that it is possible to do by human counsel and industry," nor does He warn sinners in any special way, " since He has already warned them through the natural law and reason He has given them " (A. II, xxii, 13, 15). And by faith in the teaching of the Church, since there are truths which " exceed all judgment and reason," which God has revealed " once and for all," and so fully through the Word, His Son, that He has no more to say, for " all the faith has been given to us in Christ and there is no more to be revealed, nor ever will be," so that " we must now be guided in all things by the law of Christ made man, and of His Church and ministers after a human and visible manner . . . holding simply to the teaching of the Church and its faith . . . being content to know the mysteries and truths with the simplicity and truth with which the Church proposes them to us " (A. II, xxii, 7 ; xxvii, 4 ; xxix, 12). It may be noted in passing that the doctrine of chap. xxii is particularly valuable against the claim of sectaries, already vocal in the Saint's day and rabid in ours, to be the apostles of new and greater revelations than that already given by our Lord and committed to His Church. St. John is emphatic that since the Incarnation there is and can be no need to seek any revelation of God

beyond that given in and by His Word, "and He has no other" in whom "He spake to us altogether, once and for all, in this sole Word, and has no more to say . . . wherefore he that would now desire to ask of God, or to seek any vision or revelation, would not only act ignorantly but would be committing an offence against God by not setting his eyes totally upon Christ, without seeking any new or other thing." Nor should anyone by himself "believe that his experiences are of God, nor conform himself, nor trust in them, without the Church or its ministers, for God will not make clear and confirm the truth in the heart of one who is alone." And the importance St. John attaches to this submission to the Church is further shown by his statement that it is precisely those to whom God has given much light and virtue and who have held much converse with Him, who will be severely judged if, relying upon their personal experiences and graces, neglect the things they knew to be of obligation.

The Saint's teaching upon the childhood of the Christian life lays stress upon four points:—

(1) The necessity of the ordinary means of grace and the common exercises to which all Christians are bound.

(2) The necessity of Detachment.

(3) Of the Imitation of Christ, and so

(4) Of the practice of mental prayer.

(1) There are passages in the Saint's writings, as in those of other masters of the spiritual life, which if taken by themselves, not in the whole context of his teaching and practice, may seem to imply a certain condemnation of obligations and practices which the Church lays upon or allows to her children. St. John, for instance, has some very plain things to say about the use of sacred images, and makes severe strictures upon various pious practices almost in the tone of a non-Catholic. It might almost be said that he is at one with the latter in regarding Catholicism as a dangerous religion, for the reason that it does make an appeal to the æsthetic and emotional side of human nature. But he knows, as the non-Catholic does not, that its danger

derives precisely from the fact that it is such a good thing, since it is the best not the worst things which are most dangerous to man. For the higher and better a thing is, the more spiritual it is, the more it is capable of being degraded, or at least rendered harmful by unworthy or careless hands. He was very conscious, too, that whilst all the gifts of God in the supernatural order are very good, yet they are so only when seen in relation to the End for which they exist, and also, that many of them are only good for certain stages in the soul's progress. Distinction must be made between that which is always necessary for all, for example, Mass, the Sacraments, prayer and mortification in some form, and that which belongs primarily to one or other of the successive stages of the spiritual life, as meditation belongs to that of beginners, and contemplation to proficients, using here St. John's own division. A further distinction arises from the fact we have seen already that the soul's progress is marked by a transition from a certain and comparatively low appreciation and use of sensible things to a more spiritual one, in which the attention passes from the outward to the inward or, as the scholastics say, from the *sacramentum* to the *res*, the inner, spiritual reality of the sacrament or sacramental. The Saint makes this clear in a chapter of *The Ascent*, in which he is speaking of the need of emptying the memory of the images or ideas of past or present things, except so far, he carefully adds, "as is sufficient to understand and do what is of obligation . . . for a man must not fail to think of and remember what he ought to know and do, since if he is not attached to such things for himself, this will not harm him." But, he goes on, "it must be remembered that in this our doctrine, we do not agree, nor do we wish to do so, with that of those pestilent men who, influenced by satanic pride and envy, wish to deprive the eyes of the faithful of the holy and necessary use, and the most worthy adoration of images of God and the saints. This our doctrine is very different from that, for we do not here mean, as they do, that images should not be used or adored, we only explain the difference there is between

them and God, so that men may learn to pass beyond the painted image so as not to be hindered from going on to the living truth, using the former only so far as is sufficient for them to arrive at the spiritual. For means are good and necessary to the end " (A. III, xv, 3).

The last sentence contains the gist of what is ever fundamental and immediate in the Saint's mind, that is, to make men understand in what true spirituality consists and the proper use of the means by which it is attained. True spirituality consists in the loving knowledge of God and entire conformity to His will which results in such an intimate union between the soul and God that, as he says, " the soul becomes God by participation," or as the Fathers of the Church say, is deified, or St. Paul, " filled with all the fulness of God." [Such a spirituality is not accomplished in a moment, nor, indeed, can it be so communicated by God to the soul, which must be dealt with according to its nature, which is not only incapable in itself of such a sudden transformation, but must take part in it by an active putting off of the old man of sinful tendencies and desires so that God may clothe it in the new man " created in Christ Jesus." What is so constantly forgotten is, first, that just as faith is the opposite of sight, so spirituality is the opposite of sensibility, and second, that the Christian life is a growing up into Christ, as the Apostle teaches, not, as is so often imagined, the addition of and clinging to an increasing number of observances and practices which, good as any of them may be, do not constitute the spiritual life, and not infrequently choke and hinder it. " Would that I could persuade spiritual persons that this way to God consists not in a multiplicity of considerations, nor in ways or methods of such kind, nor in consolations, however necessary these may be for beginners " (A. II, vii, 8). " Oh, if spiritual persons did but know how much good and abundance of spirit they lose through not seeking to raise their desires above childish things " (*ibid.* I, v, 4). For there is no more common error than for Christians to remain in the nursery or preparatory school as St. John says " in an elementary state of union

with God," not seeing that the beginnings of the spiritual life are but a beginning, and that, as says St. Jerome, "in Christians it is the end which is required." The foundation of many a spiritual house has been laid well enough but to what use if it is not built upon, but only used to be paced backward and forward upon, or as a mere basis for scaffolding serving no purpose than to be climbed up and down? It would be difficult to estimate the number of people who have begun well yet through not perceiving the need or possibility of "going on to perfection" have thrown away the fruit of their beginning and imperilled their souls. St. John, then, assumes that the converted soul will throw itself into the full practice of the common Christian life, of which sufficient knowledge is available for all. But he knows that when it comes to what is most essential and without which all the practices of the Christian life are comparatively useless, that is, detachment and the imitation of Christ, there is much more to be said and learnt than is commonly supposed.

(2) The subject of detachment occupies so prominent a place in the first two parts of St. John's trilogy, for *The Ascent* and *The Dark Night* must be treated as one work, that it is hardly surprising that the more or less casual reader should, as often happens, miss the purpose which led the Saint to lay such emphasis upon it, although from the outset his mind is revealed as being actually absorbed in that purpose and end, which is the triumph of Divine Charity in the soul, effecting its union with God. His doctrine of *Nada* is determined by the simple Christian truth that God is Love, and that the soul can do nothing more Divine than to love God with all its heart and soul and mind and strength, with, in its perfection, a more than human love since it is, as our Lord has declared, the very love of the Eternal Father for His beloved Son, "that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them and I in them" (John xvii, 26), that so "the soul loves God with the will of God, which is also her will; and thus she will love Him even as much as she is loved by God . . ." since God gives her "His own love, wherewith she may love Him" (S.C. xxxviii, 2, 3).

St. John frequently speaks of the Christian life as a journey on which the soul must leave its own way, desire and will and all things in order "to pass on to the goal . . . which is God," the End unending of the way. "Upon this road we must ever journey in order to attain our goal," remembering, too, the words of our Lord that "Strait is the gate and narrow the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Three things, then, are to be considered: The End and Goal of our journey, the nature of him who journeys, and the Way by which he must go. We must begin with the End since in every journey, indeed, in every undertaking, it is this which, although it come last in the order of attainment, is yet first in mind and intention. Whether a man set out on a journey, or to build a house, or to write a book, it is the End which determines the way he shall take, the means he shall use, and the energies to be employed. Failing a definite end which is sought a man is but a mere wanderer, an idle caster of stones into the sea, a dabbler in vain dreams, one whose life has no substance or reality, who although he range the world has no more to show for it than if he had remained in the backwater of a provincial suburb. Movement of itself has no value, there must be some purpose or end to confer dignity and usefulness upon it. Success or failure can only be measured by an end sought; neither can be attributed to a man who has no end in view.

The End which occupies the whole of St. John's thought is that for which man was created and to which all other so-called ends are but means by which he is enabled to reach the End—God Himself, who is man's End, not in a static sense, as a full stop, but as the Fulfilment, Completion and Perfection of that human nature which, as we have said, has its greatest dignity and meaning in the fact that it is a capacity for God, "to be filled with all the fulness of God," teaches St. Paul. This end is only finally and perfectly attained after this life when, as the Beloved Disciple says, "we shall be like God because we shall see Him as He is," and will consist of the perfect harmonizing of all the faculties

of our nature with the Being of God, so that there is nothing in that nature which is in any way or degree contrary to God. This union with God surpasses both that of nature and grace, it is a union of the human mind and will with the Divine, eternal Mind and Will of God, a union of the human spirit with God who is Pure Spirit, a union of human personality with the Personal God. The last phrase needs underlining in an age in which there is a tendency—as in the writings of Eddington, J. J. W. Sullivan, Joad, Middleton Murry, and in such novelists as Charles Morgan—to exalt a non-moral pseudo-mysticism in which the existence of a Personal God is denied, and we are left with a flow of words which upon examination mean nothing at all. As a student of philosophy said recently, “When Eddington warns me that the scientific statements he is about to make are difficult to grasp, I usually find that they are perfectly clear and lucid, but when he turns to that mystic philosophy which he is prone to, I can’t make any sense of what he is driving at.”

A God who is not Personal is no God for man who is a person, and cannot be perfected by anything less than himself, by any “thing” or idea however great it may be. Man is subject to a law which operates through all creation, the law which requires that a being can only be completed and brought to its fullest state by something more, above and greater than itself, something which it does not possess of itself, yet is capable of possessing by assimilation into itself. The plant needs more than the stone, the animal more than the plant, man more than any other being of earth, the things of which are incapable of satisfying or completing him. The idea that things are sufficient for man’s life and happiness—an idea negated by centuries of human experience no less than by the words of Jesus Christ,—lies at the source of all that is destroying our civilization, culture and freedom. For all that which is below man, who is a person, good as it may be, when treated as all that he needs, only narrows, corrupts and destroys him. The fact of man’s personality cries out that the source and reason of his being

cannot be less than himself, God cannot be "thing" but a Personal God. The modern writer who talks about the mystics being concerned with becoming one with the universe or with nature only shows his ignorance of both the mystics and of the fundamental need of human nature, which being personal could never find its perfection in the individual, finite, created thing which is the universe, which once was not and shall not be, but only in the Personal, infinite, uncreated Fulness of Being which God is. When, then, St. John speaks of union with God he means the union of the rational human, intelligent, willing and loving spirit of man with God Himself, and this, not in the ultimate and final perfection of union which is the fruition of the Beatific Vision in heaven, but in so far as such union is possible in this life. That his description of that union should sound almost unintelligible to large numbers of those who read him is hardly surprising when we reflect upon the threadbare conceptions of what God is so current in our day, and when even the religiously minded think more about "going to heaven" than about going to God, and are more interested in such questions as to whether we shall know our relations and friends there, or meet our favourite pet animals, than in what alone matters, the union of their mind and will with the Mind and Will of God. The future life must be thought of and sought not in terms of place but in terms of God, its attainment as one of a spiritual movement and adherence not in one of the senses, exterior or interior, for whilst these have their place in the beginning of the soul's journey toward God, they are incapable of establishing it in union with Him. For as our Lord has said, "That which is of the flesh is flesh," and cannot pass beyond its natural capacity; the spirit alone, "the operations of which are contrary to those of sense . . . has capacity for communion with God" (S.C. xxxi, 4). In emphasizing this as he does, St. John is but underlining the teaching of the New Testament in such words as those in which the Apostle speaks of the Christian as one who walks "not after the flesh, but after the spirit," the "spiritually minded" in whom dwells the Spirit of

God, who "through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the body" and "led by the Spirit" are truly the sons of God (Rom. viii).

From the End, Source and Motive of the soul's journey, we pass to consider man, the traveller, who, both by his nature, which is other than that of God, being created, dependent and finite, a composite being who if he is united to God on one side of his nature is no less one with the earth from which his body is formed, and even more by the fact of sin, which has subjected him to creatures lower than himself, that by no means of his own can he attain to the high estate of union with Him. The dignity of the soul consists in that it was created for that union, its misery in the fact that it has set its desire and affection upon creatures, and that "all the affections which it has for creatures are pure darkness before God, so that whilst the soul is clothed in these affections, it has no capacity for being enlightened and possessed by the pure and simple light of God, unless it first cast them from it, since it is not possible for light to agree with darkness; for, as St. John says, *Tenebræ eam non comprehenderunt*, that is, darkness cannot receive the light" (A. I, iv, 1). The Saint goes on to quote an axiom of philosophy, which he frequently refers to, to the effect that two contraries cannot exist together in the same person, so that darkness, which is affection for creatures, and light which is God, having no likeness or accord with each other, cannot exist together in the soul." "What communion," asks the Apostle, "hath light with darkness?" "How," asks St. John, "can there be contained in one will affection for creatures and affection for God? For what has the creature to do with the Creator? The sensible with the spiritual? The visible with the invisible? The temporal with the eternal? Food which is celestial, pure, spiritual with food which is purely of the senses? The detachment of Christ with attachment to anything else?" He passes to another illustration drawn from the Thomistic philosophy which teaches, in opposition to other schools, that only one "form" can exist in any one subject. "As in

natural generation no form can be introduced until the preceding, contrary form is first expelled from the subject, since this, being contrary, is an impediment to the other; even so, as long as the soul is subjected to the sensual spirit, the spirit which is purely spiritual cannot enter into it " (A. I, vi, 1, 2). It must be noted that the Spanish " sensual " and " sensualidad " is usually used by St. John as synonymous with " sensitiva," that is as applying to all the faculties and movements of the lower part of the soul, not in its more common significance as used to-day. But the Saint's teaching as to the spiritual nature of union with God must certainly not be taken to imply that it is a union of the higher part of man's nature alone, that the lower sensitive part intimately connected with the body, is to be discarded, and that his teaching on detachment and mortification implies a Platonic or Manichean conception of the latter. What he actually teaches is the Christian doctrine of the need of, and the way by which the disordered nature of man may be restored to unity, to the Divine order in which it was created, and which God became man in order to re-establish, that so the whole man may go forward to his end. Thus in the last stanza of *The Spiritual Canticle*, the Bride " knowing that the desire of her will is now detached from all things and is united to her God with most intimate love; and that the sensitive part of the soul, with all its powers, faculties and desires, *is conformed to the spirit*," having been " reformed and purified and brought into conformity with the spiritual part, in such manner that not merely is it not prevented, but is the rather fitted to receive these spiritual blessings, since it already participates in those which it possesses according to its capacity."

The Way of Detachment, then, is not the way of destruction and death, but the way to life and light and freedom, as our Lord declares in the Gospel, " He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life," and " If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed " (John viii, 12, 36). St. John's doctrine of detachment, so often regarded as going beyond

the teaching of the New Testament, is in reality but a sober commentary upon the whole tenor of it, and especially upon such passages as those to be found in Matthew v, 29-30; vi, 19-24; Romans vi-viii; 2 Corinthians vi-vii, 1; Galatians v, vi, 7-8; Ephesians iv, 17-24; Philippians iii, 7-16; Colossians iii, 1-10; 1 Timothy vi, 6-16; John ii, 15-17. The reader will do well to renew his acquaintance with these, and especially to note that in the Pauline passages, "flesh" does not always stand for "body" but, as with St. John of the Cross, for the tendencies of the lower part of the soul, and that "lust" means wrong or inordinate desire, a natural desire going astray, led by the mind mistaken as to what is its true good.

The necessity for detachment consists first in the fact that we are commanded to love God with *all* our heart and soul and mind and strength, that is with the whole of our being united to Him by an act of our mind and will. For this it is necessary that the mind should see that God is deserving of such love, not merely because of what He has done for us but because He is God, with whom nothing created can compare. "All the being of creation, compared with the infinite being of God, is nothing . . . and that which is not can have no agreement with that which is" (*A. I.*, iv, 4). To love God for His gifts is to love Him in a selfish and mercenary manner. "He who seeks from God," says Augustine, "anything else but God esteems what He seeks more than Him from whom he seeks it. Hath God, then, no reward? None—save Himself." So also à Kempis, "A generous lover rests not in the gift but in Me, above every gift . . . although thou shouldest have all created things, thou couldest not be happy or blessed: for only in God, who created all things, doth all thy bliss and happiness consist." All the beauty and attractive grace, St. John goes on, all the goodness, wisdom and knowledge, all dominion and freedom of the world, all the delights and pleasures of the will, all the wealth and glory of the created universe is less than nothing in comparison with God. "Thou shalt have none other gods but Me," not, thou shalt have nothing else,

but "no other gods," and a god is that which a man sets his mind and affection upon.

Thus St. John brings us to the second reason for Detachment which is that we become like that, and even lower than that, upon which our mind and affection are set, that which we desire and seek ends by absorbing us, making us its own. "It must be known that the affection and attachment which the soul has for creatures causes it to be like the creatures; and the greater is its affection the more it becomes like and equal to them; for love causes a likeness between he who loves and that which he loves. . . . Thus he that loves a creature becomes as low as is that creature, and in some ways lower; for love not only makes the lover equal to that which is loved, but subject to the object loved. . . . So the soul that *sets its affections upon creatures* will be unable to comprehend God; and until it be purified, will neither be able to possess Him here below, through the pure transformation of love, nor there in clear vision" (A. I, iv, 3). For, as our Lord says, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon," and our Saint, "So he who wills to love any other thing *together with God*, without doubt makes little of God, because he weighs in the balance with God that which, as we have said, is very far distant from Him . . . for, as there is nothing which equals God, a great injury is done to Him by the soul that loves and clings to any other thing with Him. And if this is so, what would it be if it were to love anything more than God?" (A. I, v, 4, 5).

Attention should be paid to the words italicized above in order to avoid the error of thinking that the Saint condemns that affection for creatures which God has bestowed upon our nature. His whole meaning, as is evidenced by his own life and attitude toward relations, friends and created things, for all of which he had a great love, precisely because it was an ordered love, is that affection must not be "set upon" creatures in the way that it ought to be set upon God, nor ought any creature to be loved "together with God," which is to esteem such a creature as equal to God, to act as the Roman Emperor who placed an image of our

Lord among the other gods of his private chapel, an example followed by an obscure sect of to-day, which certain deluded Christians are not ashamed to patronize. Yet such idolatry, rare in this form, is not less but even more real when the thing loved is of the mind, which is common enough. Creatures are to be loved but as God loves them because seen as He sees them, as means and aids toward that one love of Himself which is not exclusive but inclusive of all. Our Lord did not love His Father less because He loved his Mother as son never before loved, and loved His friends, the flowers of the field, and Jerusalem so much that He wept at the thought of its destruction. And it is the Saints, not Romeo and Juliet, Abelard and Heloïse, Antony and Cleopatra, who have been the world's great lovers. "Here," says a non-Catholic admirer of St. Teresa, "is a woman who can teach men how to love."

The Christian demand is not simply one of the choice between sin and God, but between all things loved for themselves or for ourselves and God loved, preferred, chosen before all things, even, if need be, life itself. Until that is understood there is still need, as G. K. Chesterton says of St. Thomas, of Saints like St. John of the Cross "to convert Christians to Christianity."

St. John's doctrine of detachment is rooted in his doctrine of God, and of that union with Him for which man is created. Nothing of the created universe is comparable with God, and thus nothing of it can bring about that union. The soul needs then a complete detachment from all things, both without and within itself, not only material but spiritual, that so that which has been created to be the temple of God may be freely opened and given up to the Divine indwelling spoken of by our Lord, "If any man love Me, he will keep My words and My Father will love him and We will come unto him and make our abode with Him." Further, beyond the impossibility of any creature forming a proximate means of that union, St. John proceeds to show the positive evils that the desire for and attachment to creatures produces in the soul, the first of which is that "they deprive it of the

spirit of God," and the second "that the soul wherein they dwell is wearied, tormented, darkened, defiled and weakened, as it is written in Jeremiah. . . . They have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living water, and they have hewn them out broken cisterns which can hold no water," for the more desire the soul has for creatures the less capacity it has for God, Creatures, indeed, are "crumbs that have fallen from the table of God," yet the children are bidden eat at the table with their Father, "which is to feed upon His spirit," not to rest satisfied with the crumbs which are the portion of dogs, to whom those who feed on creatures are likened "for they are ever hungering, because the crumbs only serve to quicken rather than to satisfy the appetite." He who gives rein to his desires "is ever discontented and dissatisfied like one who is hungry," and cannot experience the fulness of God, whom these desires more oppose than does nothingness, "for nothingness resists Him not at all."

From the middle of chap. vi to chap. xi, St. John describes with a wealth of illustration and psychological insight the character of the negative evils which are the consequence of desire for and attachment to creatures. But let us note here exactly what St. John is talking about. It is not detachment from mortal sin, nor even detachment from the possession of things, whether they be things outside us or those of our nature. "We are not treating here of the lack of things, for the soul is not detached from things if it still has a desire for them; but of the detachment of taste and desire for things, for it is this which leaves the soul empty and free of them, although it may still possess them; for it is not the things of this world which occupy or harm the soul, since they do not enter into it, but the will and desire for them which dwell within it" (A. I, iii, 4). We are reminded of our Lord's teaching that it is not that which comes from without that defiles a man but that which comes from within, and of the universal Christian abhorrence of the belief that things are evil in themselves, a belief which tends to make asceticism and detachment a source of evil instead of good. There are no evil things, there are

only evil thoughts and desires which twist what should have been for our wealth into an occasion of falling, as the Psalmist says. "The soul," says St. John, "is as perfect as when God created it," that is, in its essential nature, one primary characteristic of which is that it is free to choose what it will. In such a dignity, raising it above the merely animal, lies its danger, the possibility of choosing and using good things in a wrong way or for a wrong end, or of becoming so attached to them that they hinder rather than aid, as they are meant to do. Later in *The Ascent* St. John will show that it is only when the soul is detached from the desire for things that it most fully possesses them and can enjoy them. A man "will find greater joy and recreation in creatures by detachment from them (*disapropio de ellas* = not regarding them as his own), for he cannot rejoice in them if he looks upon them as his own. For attachment causes an anxiety that, like a bond, ties the spirit to earth and allows not largeness of heart. He will acquire also, in detachment from things, a clear knowledge of them, so that he will well understand the truths relating to them, whether natural or supernatural. In consequence, he will enjoy them in a very different way to the man who is not detached from them, having a great advantage over him, since he enjoys them according to the truth of them, whilst the other does so according to their deceptive seeming; the one seeing the best, the other the worst in them; the one getting at the substance, the other, bound to them by the senses, only at the accidents. For sense cannot grasp or arrive at anything more than the accident" the outside of things, "but the spirit, purged of the clouds and species of the accidents penetrates to the truth and value of things, for this is its object" (*A. III, xx, 2*).

A modern novelist, L. A. G. Strong, has expressed the same truth in the words of a character in his *The Jealous Ghost*. "He did not want anything or anybody. Never to want anything, for himself, again—this was wisdom, this was peace. He was making no sentimental mistake, no cloistral fallacy. His gesture was not one of renunciation

but of common sense. As long as a man wanted to possess things, so long as he could not be delighted with the beauty of a flower without wanting to pluck it for himself, he might not be at peace. He might not happily experience joy and sorrow. He might not with serenity appreciate all life's weathers." Or as Cecil Lewis writes in *Sagittarius Rising*, the achievement of harmony with one's environment "involves mastery, for that alone gives detachment, and only from detachment comes harmony—a sense of values." And of such mastery he earlier records his experience as an airman in the War, "We had to win victories over ourselves long before we won them over the enemy," a potent fact of the spiritual life.

It is not the possession or non-possession of things which matters, it is our attitude toward them. The truly detached man or woman is as often found amongst the "Haves" as amongst the "Have nots," if indeed not more often among the former. It is quite common to find that those who have possessions of one sort or another can most easily do without them, that, for instance, it is not by any means the poor or uneducated who make better religious than the rich or cultured, or that those born "in the lap of luxury" less cheerfully endure the absence of the things they have been accustomed to than those "born in the gutter," endure, say, the exigences of a soldier's life in the trenches.

St. John's doctrine of detachment is, then, primarily concerned with the interior not the exterior, with the desires and appetites, not the things upon which those desires and appetites may be fixed. It is not what a man possesses but what he *is* that matters,¹ the orientation of his mind and will which spells for him peace, harmony, fulness of life or conflict, disorder, weariness and disappointment. For the desires and appetites yielded to and indulged are like restless and discontented children, ever demanding things from

¹ A notable illustration of this essential point in St. John's doctrine has just been given in a statement made by Lord Nuffield upon the occasion of his munificent gift to medical research at Oxford. "I care nothing about money," he is reported to have said, adding that he believed he could easily go back to the poverty of his early days and "probably be the better for it."

their mother and never satisfied. Attained with much labour they quickly disappoint, leaving only a greater craving than before. They torment the soul which they bind in chains, reducing it to a servitude from which it would fain escape yet cannot of itself; they darken and blind the intellect so that neither "the sun of natural reason nor that of the supernatural wisdom of God" can shine upon or illumine it. And since memory and will depend upon the intellect, these too become dull and disordered, the blind lead the blind in a self-created darkness in which it is impossible to make any true progress. "For this reason the ignorance of certain souls must be lamented, who burden themselves with extraordinary penances, and with many other voluntary exercises, thinking that this practice or that will suffice to bring them to the union of Divine Wisdom, but it is not so unless they diligently seek to deny their desires, upon which, if they gave half the labour they give to other things, they would profit more in a month than by all the other exercises in many years" (A. I, viii, 4). This needs to be pondered by many, as also the following from the same chapter. "A man must not trust to a good understanding, nor to gifts received from God, thinking that because of these he is at liberty to indulge his affection and desire without being blinded and darkened and falling little by little into a worse state."

Desire defiles the soul, and as he who touches pitch is defiled so the soul that is "hot with desire for any creature draws filth from it through the heat of his desire and is stained by it." And this is so of a single inordinate desire, even if it is not a matter of mortal sin, since it brings the soul into bondage and defilement, and giving rise to other impurities which make its union with God impossible until its desires are purified" (A. I, ix, 3).

Desires cause the soul to become weak and lukewarm, depriving it of the strength necessary to persevere in the practice of virtue. For they divide the soul, dragging it this way and that, confusing the eye of the mind and the direction of the will by the many objects they present to the

soul, so that any real progress or growth is impossible. They are like "shoots upon a tree that take away its strength so that it cannot bear much fruit," they "bring no good to the soul but rather take away that which it has" and "if not mortified grow to such length that they kill the soul's life in God because it has not first killed them" (A. I, x).

No great knowledge of human nature is required for us to see how true all this is, for it is written more or less legibly upon every man, and this not only with respect to the grosser sensual desires. The evil of inordinate desire is the one thing which keeps Christians in a low and mediocre level of spiritual life; the spectacle of pious sentimentalists indulging in innumerable religious practices and full of "good works," whilst they habitually neglect the mortification of their desires and of self, is so common as to be one of the chief arguments against the Christian religion. It is not so much the sight of the open sins of professing Christians, or the falls consequent to a large extent upon human frailty that keeps so many from the Faith, it is the daily sight of selfishness, meanness, the clinging to possessions, prejudices, passions, the contrast between the soul in Church and at home, in business or society, the materialistic character and outlook of those who, vowed to a belief in and a living for a spiritual end, manifest less of the spirit of Jesus Christ than many a man and woman whom they regard as of "the world." The saints stand not only as witnesses against what is known as worldliness but against a spirituality which is more allied to that of the false mystics than to that of Christianity, a "spirituality" which is lacking in that spirit of detachment from desires and self which is at the very root of the Christian life. If the world to-day perishes for lack of vision, is it not that it is Christians who, as Maritain says, "are dying of complacency and insipidity, of vulgarized and minimized truths, of a religion reduced to our own standards," have and are obscuring the vision which is meant to shine through them? That we waste our time in praying and beseeching God to bring about what might already be had we not hindered it? St. John more than once compares the soul

to a window which the light cannot illumine and penetrate if it is stained or misty, but only in the degree that it is clean and pure," so much so, that if it be wholly pure and clean, the sun's rays will transform and illumine it so that it will itself be as a ray and give the same light" (4. II, v, 6). "I am the Light of the world," says our Lord, and "Ye are the light of the world, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father—the Father of lights—who is in heaven." But none of this may be—despite what we love to call "good works," the which G. K. Chesterton once satirized,

But for the Virtuous Things you do,
The Righteous Work, the Public care,
It shall not be forgiven you,

unless we strip ourselves of all desire, even for good things, < that we may have but one desire for the Good of all things, God Himself, whose Good shall then shine through the purified window of the soul.

"How hardly," that is, with what difficulty, says Jesus Christ, "shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." Riches is a comparative term; who has not heard the rich lament their poverty? and no kind of riches is in itself a hindrance to that perfection which is sanctity. It is the desire for, the anxious clinging to, the setting of the heart upon riches, so that the soul is brought down to their level, or even lower, that hinders, is that from which a man must tear himself free, as he would from the strangling grasp of a python. It is from that within himself, which seeks to possess and dominate him from within so that to detach himself is like tearing himself to pieces—yet "It were better to enter into life halt or maimed rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire." That it would be "better" does not imply that detachment means dismemberment, for the object of detachment is the recovery of wholeness, of an ordered nature, it only implies that even if something necessary only for the present is sacrificed, this is better than to lose all by clinging

to a part, as a man suffers an operation in order to save his life.

St. John would make us see the superficial character of the idea that it is only sin—as a deliberate infraction of the Divine law—which hinders our union with God, an idea which comes from a low conception of what God is and of the nature of Divine union. He is not addressing sinners, in the ordinary sense of the term, but practising Catholics, those whom he says are “like rich vessels, loaded with good works and spiritual exercises and the virtues and favours God has granted them, yet because they have not the courage to break with some pleasurable thing, or attachment or affection (all of which are one), never make any progress or attain to the port of perfection, though they need no more than to make one good flight in order to snap and break the cord of desire, and get rid of that sucking-fish of desire which clings to them. It is a very sorrowful thing that when God has enabled them to break from other stronger cords of affections for sins and vanities, they should fail to attain to so great a good because they will not disentangle themselves from some childish thing, a mere thread or hair, which God has bidden them overcome for love of Him. And what is worse is, not only that they make no progress, but because of this attachment they go back, losing that for which they have gained by so much time and labour; for it is well known that, on this road, not to go forward is to go back, and not to be gaining is to be losing” (A. I, xi, 5). The Christian life is a positive not a negative thing, and the Apostle speaks of “a falling short of the glory of God” (Rom. iii, 23), and so of the perfection of our being toward which He is ever bidding us press forward, and St. John is only reiterating the teaching of the New Testament and of the Saints when he insists that there is no stage in the way to God in which the soul may rest content with the progress it has made. “The soul that is attached to anything, however much good there may be in it, will not arrive at the liberty of Divine union . . . for it does not matter whether a bird be held by a slender or by a stout cord, since, however

slender it may be, it will still be held so long as it does not break the cord and fly away."

The Saint is fully aware that this is a hard saying, and proceeds to answer the question as to whether, in order to attain to the high estate of union with God, this total mortification of the will must be accomplished, or is it enough to deny the greatest desires and to leave what seem to be of less importance. He replies that we must distinguish between "natural involuntary" desires, and those which are willed, consented to, and taken pleasure in. The first "hinder the soul little, or not at all, from attaining to union, so long as they are not consented to nor pass beyond the first movements (that is, all those in which the rational will has no part, either at first or afterward); since to take away these, that is, to mortify them altogether in this life is impossible." Our human nature, this composite thing of soul and body, is full of desires which are naturally good, the desire to see, for food, of sex and so on, and these cannot nor ought to be entirely got rid of or destroyed. They do and may exist in the lower part of our nature, taken as a whole, whilst they are not allowed to become part of the rational spirit by being willed as well as felt. Every one knows what it is, and this often in one's time of worship or prayer, to feel and experience movements of the lower nature of one sort or another, but such movements do not hinder union with God so long as the rational will refuses to have anything to do with them. They may be so strong and persistent as to cause the impression and fear that they have been willed whilst actually all our will is set against them. And this is the more so when that which is of the lower part of our nature, feelings and emotions, has not been seen as less of our whole self than acts of the intellect and will, so that it is what we think and will, not what we feel, that is of importance. For, as the Saint adds later, "although one who suffers such involuntary desires to such an extent that he is tempted to think that they are defiling him, this is not the case so long as his will is set against them, rather he is gaining by his resistance the opposite virtues, such as fortitude, purity,

light and consolation " (A. I, xii, 6). God is Intellect and Will, not emotion or feeling, which are impossible to Him who is Spirit, since they are of the body, and union with Him is of that spiritual part of our nature which alone is capable of such union. And it is not involuntary feelings or natural desires which hinder that union, since they are not, or as far as they are not, either caused by or followed by the activity of the will, but only voluntary desires and affections whether of the gravity of mortal or of venial sin, or are only imperfections, all of which, however small they appear to be, must be renounced, that the human will may be entirely at one with the will of God. That is, the soul must not "intentionally and knowingly give the consent of its will to imperfections, and it must come to have the power and liberty to will this intentionally. I say, knowingly, because unintentionally and unknowingly, or outside of the soul's power, it may well fall into imperfections and venial sins, and the natural desires we have spoken of . . . but of the voluntary desires, which are venial sins committed with intention, although they be concerned with very small things, one that is not vanquished is enough to impede union " (*ibid.* I, xi, 3).

A habit is much better or worse than an isolated act, the habitual attitude of the mind of many people is a much worse thing than the isolated or occasional falls of others into sins they regard with such abhorrence. It is, for instance, a very much less sin for a man to get drunk on a festive occasion than for another to have a fixed mind that alcoholic drink is an evil in itself. The typical Puritan parents' attitude toward a daughter who got into trouble, as the phrase goes, was much more damaging to him than was her fall, especially when it was the consequence of a natural passion linked to ignorance. St. John, it is true, has not such cases in his mind, but he is more concerned with the kind of habitual attachments of the mind and will, which there is no desire or intention to conquer, than with acts of human frailty which are not willed or desired. Such habit, for instance, as talking too much, liking to hear one's own voice, tittle-

tattle, attachment to a particular person, "I can't think what I should do without so and so," or to things, like the sister in Housman's *Possessions*, who after her death, meeting her sisters in what they imagine to be heaven, quarrels with them over the possession of the family teapot; rash judgments and detraction, fancies for certain things, curiosity, wanting to know and hear what does not concern one, is unimportant, distracting or only sought to be known for knowing's sake. "Any one of these imperfections which becomes a habit of the soul, is of as great hindrance to its growth and progress in virtue as if it were to fall daily into many other imperfections and unpremeditated venial sins, which do not proceed from an habitual custom of attachment to evil, and will not hinder the soul so much as when it holds to attachment to anything" (*A. xi, 4*).

We cannot but be thankful for the scrupulous care with which the Saint makes these important distinctions, so necessary to be understood, especially by those who have been led to attach more importance to the emotional than to the rational side of the Christian life, or those who, as we have seen, think less of the effects of habits than of acts. Nor is a further warning, the fruit of experience, to be passed by. We have seen many, says St. John, who have made great progress, but who through beginning some slight attachment, "under the pretext of good, of conversation and friendship, lose their poverty of spirit, desire for God and holy solitude, fall from the joy and whole-hearted devotion in spiritual exercises, and not stop until they have lost all; and this because they did not check that beginning of sense-desire and delight, keeping themselves in solitude for God" (*ibid. xi, 5*). "He that contemneth small things shall fall little by little" (*Ecclus. xix, 1*).

Two further questions remain. Does any desire effect those positive and privative evils which have already been considered, and, does any one desire, however small and of any kind, cause all these evils, or do some cause this evil and others that?

To the first the Saint answers that mortal sin alone

separates the soul from God, but all desires which are of the matter of mortal sin, and those which are voluntary with regard to venial sin and of imperfections, each are sufficient to turn away the soul from God since they involve a turning toward creatures. But whilst the desires of mortal sin, which has its seat in the mind and will, not in the body, cause the totality of evil, blinding, tormenting, defiling and weakening the soul, those which are of the nature of venial sins and imperfections do not effect so complete and radical evil, but only partly, in the degree that they weaken the life of grace in the soul. Further, whilst one is sufficient to cause all these privative evils, there are some which directly cause certain of them, upon which the rest follow, as one sensual desire directly effects a defilement of soul and body from which all the other evils follow, or one avaricious desire directly produces misery, a vainglorious one darkness and blindness, a gluttonous desire lukewarmness in virtue, in each case the principal effect bringing the others in its train. For since each of the desires is contrary to some virtue, an act of which produces suavity, peace, consolation, light, purity and strength all together, so one inordinate desire causes torment, fatigue, weariness, blindness and weakness. And as with virtues so with vices, each grows by practice and all by the practice of any one of them. The evils which follow upon indulged desires are not at once visible since the pleasure of the moment leaves no room for them and blinds the soul to their existence, but the "after-taste" is clearly experienced. There is a bitterness in the sweetest of indulged desires as every one knows. "Yet," concludes St. John, with sad knowledge, "there are some men so blind and insensible as not to feel this, for, as they walk not in God, they cannot see that which hinders them from Him" (A. I, xii)

Chap. xiii, "which treats of the way and manner which must be adopted in order to enter into this night of sense," obviously has to do with the second part of this night, as is not only indicated by the subject matter, but also by the words added to the above title in the *Editio princeps* (Alcalá,

1618), "through faith." It is this second half of the Night of Sense which is entered both actively and passively, and to which the Saint's counsels "for the conquering of the desires" chiefly belong. That these counsels may be seen in their proper perspective, it will be advisable for the reader to recall certain facts already reviewed.

First, the particular class of persons whom the Saint is primarily writing for, who are not only religious, but religious who are seeking to attain to "perfect detachment of spirit" and to that high union with God which is possible in this life, but which is only reached by a comparatively few souls. By all such souls the teaching of this chapter is to be received wholly and literally, as also by any, who though not religious, are called to this same end. This is borne out by the additional fact that the concluding directions are to be found at the base of the diagram the Saint drew at El Calvario for the nuns of Beas, to whom he was especially devoted, the directions applying to the central, direct way to the summit of the Mount.

Second, the counsels given in this chapter with regard to detachment, mortification and self-denial must be interpreted and applied by other persons in conformity with "the general condition of human nature and the particular dispositions of each," as the Carmelite Congress at Madrid in 1926 wisely laid down.

The first counsel concerns the imitation of Christ and will be considered in the following chapter.

The second emphasizes the necessity of detachment and mortification for such imitation, which is only possible when the life of Christ is studied and meditated in prayer, so that a man may "know how to imitate it and to conduct himself in all things as our Lord would." Thus, "in order that he may do this well, every pleasure which offers itself to the senses, *if it be not purely for the honour and glory of God*, must be totally renounced and rejected for the love of Jesus Christ, who in this life had no other pleasure, neither desired any, than to do the will of His Father, which He called His meat and drink. I give as example. If the pleasure of hearing

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things that *do not concern the service and honour of God*, present itself to a man, neither let him desire to enjoy that pleasure, nor to hear such things ; and if the pleasure of looking at things that *lead him not to God* present itself, let him not wish for such pleasure or look at such things ; and if in conversation or in any other way it present itself, let him do the same. And so with regard to all the senses, in so far *as he can rightly avoid* any pleasure ; for, if he cannot, it is enough that he desire not to enjoy it, although these things are present before him."

It is from no desire to water down the Saint's doctrine but rather to clarify it that we have underlined certain phrases in which St. John himself guards his teaching from exaggeration just as he has done already by insisting that his doctrine of detachment is not concerned with possessions but desires. The governing motive of the detachment of the senses is to be found in the imitation of Christ "who pleased not Himself" (Rom. xv. 3). [It is here mainly concerned with that guard of the senses which is incumbent upon all Christians, and which extends to anything which is not

Purely for the honour and glory of God.
Does not concern His service and honour.
Does not lead the soul to God.
And cannot rightly be avoided.

These are general principles which need to be applied to particular cases and occasions. But are we to understand St. John as meaning that before every pleasure affecting the senses we are to stop and ask ourselves whether it may be considered as fulfilling the conditions laid down ? Or, does he demand that we shall be immediately conscious that we are accepting or rejecting a pleasure upon the grounds enumerated ? We think not. He is addressing Christians who at least are endeavouring to know, love and serve God, who do not wish in any way to go contrary to the Divine will, who realize to more or less extent that the honour and glory of God must be the supreme centre and aim of their lives, and that all this is to be wrought out of the texture of

the particular kind of life God has called them to live, which in each case determines their particular relationship and attitude toward the things of this life. If then a person in any state of life has the habitual intention of doing "all things to the glory of God," and of avoiding anything which is contrary to His service and honour or does not, though by no means always consciously, lead to Him, such a one may be said to be following the Saint's instruction. A practising Christian may listen to music, look at pictures, read novels, take an interest in all kinds of "non-religious" things, play games, etc., so far as and as long as none of this begins to infringe upon his love and service of God. But he may not do any of these things, or anything else for itself or himself alone, as if there were anything to which God had no right or which lay outside of His honour and service. And it will be sufficiently obvious that there are things which so fail to fulfil any of these conditions that unless "they cannot rightly be avoided" they must be entirely rejected. An example is close at hand. A Christian living in the world may and should keep himself sufficiently in touch with current events; except for some particular reason, to abstain from doing so is foolish. But equally he will not read the type of newspaper, which is concerned not with news of importance, but with the horrors and vulgarities of present-day life. He may, and often must of very necessity have to do with things and events which are dangerous occasions of sin to him, yet St. John is careful to say that if this "cannot rightly be avoided" then, so long as no pleasure is taken, no harm is done. He is ever concerned with the interior, with the mind, the imagination, the memory and the will, the deep sources of human life and conduct. He is possessed with the truth of the words of the Psalmist, "I have set God before mine eyes therefore I shall not fall."

St. John proceeds to give certain counsels for the mortifying and quieting of the four natural passions of the soul, joy, hope, fear and grief, with which he will deal more fully in the third book of *The Ascent*. And it is plain that he is now especially addressing those who, as he has said in the heading

to *The Ascent*, desire to prepare themselves "in order to attain *in a short time* to Divine union," to whom he offers such instruction "that they may know how to free themselves from all that is temporal, and not to embarrass themselves with the spiritual." These counsels are :—

Endeavour always to tend towards (*Procure siempre inclinarse*) : "not to that which is easiest, but to that which is most difficult ; not to that which is most palatable, but to that which is most tasteless ; not to that which affords most pleasure, but rather that which gives least ; not to that which is restful, but which is laborious ; not to that which is consoling, but rather to that which is not so ; not to that which is greatest, but is least ; not to the highest and most precious, but to the lowest and most despised ; not to a desire for anything, but to a desire for nothing ; not to go about seeking the best of temporal things, but the worst ; and to desire to enter into total detachment, emptiness and poverty, in relation to all that is in the world, for Christ's sake."

"Hard sayings" as these appear to be at first sight, it will be found that he who sets his heart and will upon them, and acts with order and discretion, will find great delight and consolation. Three counsels are added against the concupiscence of the flesh, of the eyes, and of the pride of life : which are, to aim at self-contempt and desire others to do so ; to speak in dispraise of oneself and desire that all may do so ; to think humbly of oneself and wish that others may do likewise.

The lines which are written upon the diagram of the Ascent of the Mount are applicable to both parts of the Night of Sense, and are

In order to come to the enjoyment of all things,
 Desire enjoyment in nothing.
 To come to the possession of all,
 Desire to possess nothing at all.
 To come to be everything,
 Desire to be nothing.
 To come to the knowledge of all,
 Desire to know nothing.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN

To come to that which pleaseth thee not,
Thou must go by a way which pleases not.
To come to that which thou knowest not,
Thou must go by a way thou knowest not.
To come to that which thou possessest not,
Thou must go by a way thou hast not.
To come to that which thou art not,
Thou must go by that which thou art not.

The whole of *The Ascent* and *The Dark Night* is an exposition of and commentary upon these counsels, and an account of

THE WAY NOT TO IMPEDE THE ALL

When thou reflectest upon anything,
Thou ceasest to cast thyself upon the All.
For, in order to come from all things to the All,
Thou must deny thyself wholly in all.
And when thou comest to possess the All
Thou must do so without desiring anything,
For, if thou wilt to have anything with the All,
Thou hast not thy treasure purely in God.

Herein is the true wisdom and the fulness of life since when naught is desired save God, naught can weary or oppress the soul "for it is in the centre of its humility" and finds itself in quietude and repose.

IT will be remembered that St. John gives two primary counsels for the overcoming of the appetites and desires which, he says, he "who sincerely desires to practise them will need no others" since these include all that is necessary for his task. These two are the imitation of Christ and that detachment already considered, and one is as necessary as the other, indeed, the second is impossible without the first, and unless the imitation of Christ produce detachment, it becomes but a source of self-pleasing and self-deception, an amusing oneself with that which is meant to save one from self.

St. John is aware that no one will set out upon the Ascent of the Mount unless he has caught some glimpse of the vision of the End, as one who first catching sight of high, snow-clad mountain peaks is fired with the desire to win their summits and counts all labour and danger as naught so that he may fulfil his awakened desire. He knows that the first object of the Church is to make seeing people, to open the eyes of the blind, those whose sight has been weakened and obscured by its being centred on material things, to get them to lift up the eye of their mind, in which is man's true sight, to the eternal hills, that setting their minds on things above, as says the Apostle, they may desire and will to attain that which they see. For since no man desires and strives to attain aught but that which is seen as good and desirable, that which he most requires for the practice of the Christian life is such a compelling motive as will inspire him to rise above the level of the natural and the things of time and sense, will stir him to shake off the desires and tendencies of the lower part of his nature, to escape from a slothful contentment with things as they are, and to set out on that journey in which as he travels toward the Goal he becomes that which fits him to be one with It when the end is reached. The soul must be

Inflamed in love with yearnings,

by the Vision of its true Good which is God Himself since "in order to conquer all its desires and to deny itself the pleasure of all things, the love and affection of which inflame the will to seek enjoyment in them, it is necessary for it to be set on fire by another and a greater love, which is that of its Spouse, so that having its delight in Him and its power from Him, it should have courage and constancy to deny itself all else with ease." For so great is the attraction of the things of sense by which the natural appetite is moved that unless the higher, spiritual part is drawn to and enkindled with the desire for God, the soul will be unable to throw off the natural yoke, or to enter into the Night of Sense, still less to deprive itself of the desire for all things (*A. I.*, xiv, 2).

But not only must the End be seen, but the Way must be known, and Christ is the Way, nor is there any other, "and progress is only possible through the imitation of Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and no man comes to the Father but by Him, even as He Himself says by St. John. And in another place, He says: 'I am the Door; by Me if any man enter in He shall be saved.' Wherefore, all spirituality which desires to walk by the way of sweetness and ease, and flees from the imitation of Christ, will come to no good" (*A. II.*, vii, 8). To walk by the Way, then, is nothing else than to follow Him who is the Way, to have "a habitual desire to imitate Christ in everything that he does, conforming himself to His life, upon which he must meditate in order that he may know how to imitate it, and to conduct himself in all things as Christ would do" (*A. I.*, xiii, 3).

Two points need consideration here, first, what is meant by the imitation of Christ and, second, the practice of mental prayer by which each soul may learn how to imitate Him.

1. St. Paul has stated the essence of the imitation of our Lord in bidding us put on the mind of Christ that we may grow up into Him in all things (*Phil.* ii, 5; *Eph.* iv, 15). It is primarily, then, an imitation of the interior life of our Lord, of the occupation and direction of His Mind and Will,

SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS

of His attitude toward His Eternal Father from which flowed His relation to men and things. That interior life of His human soul is made known by the exterior activities of His life amongst men ; we are enabled to see what He thought, willed and desired by what He said and did. And since all our activity is the product of our thinking, the first condition of its being Christian is that it should proceed from and be determined by the conformity of our minds with the mind of Christ. For to be Christian is to be “ another Christ ” as the Fathers of the Church said, one who by virtue of his incorporation into the living Body of Christ is the continuation of the Gospel, which is Christ Himself, the carrying on in time and in each one’s vocation of the life and labour, the prayer and suffering, in a word “ all that Jesus began to do and to teach,” realized and exhibited in the world by those who have obeyed His call, “ Follow Me.” But this is no mere servile, copybook imitation of His exterior activity, it is the entering into and making one’s own that Divine-Human Mind, fount and source of all Christian activity, that so we may act and speak in the manner determined by the particular place and vocation which has been given to us, and which, as we see in the Saints, differs in each one. Our imitation of Christ does not so much consist in doing what He did, as in seeing as He saw, as Bernard Shaw rightly grasps when he makes Pilate ask our Lord, “ What do you mean by believing in you ? ” “ What could it mean,” answers our Lord, “ but seeing as I see.” It is by such seeing that we become the sons of God, growing up out of spiritual childhood unto “ the stature of the perfect man,” as, putting on the Mind of Christ we are delivered from our natural and sin-engendered darkness and walk as the children of light as our Lord promised, “ He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life.”

In this endeavour we have first to see what was the habitual direction of the Mind of Christ, that upon which it was set and occupied with, for it is this which dominates and determines the whole of His being and life. The Gospels

leave us in no doubt about this, they reveal the fact that the human Mind of our Lord was ever set upon God His Father and upon the fulfilment of His Will. "When He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me. . . . Lo, I come to do Thy Will O God" (Heb. x, 5-7). His first recorded utterance in the Gospel is "Know you not that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke ii, 49). For "I came not to do Mine own will but the Will of Him who sent Me" (John v, 30), that Will which He declares to be His meat and drink, refreshing even whilst it consumes Him, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me and to bring to perfection (τελειώσω) His work" (John iv, 34). And what that work was He reveals in His prayer to His Father, "I have glorified Thee on the earth, I have perfected (τελειώσας; *Vulg. consummavi*) the work which Thou gavest Me to do" (John xvii, 4); and again, "It is finished" (John xix, 30; *Vulg. consummatum est*).

There is scarcely any truth which needs more insistence upon than this, since none more determines what ought to be the outlook and attitude of the Christian mind. Obsessed as men of to-day have become with a "Satanic pre-occupation with themselves" and with the problems and needs of the world, even Christians will be found who imagine that our Lord's mind was primarily set on the redemption and salvation of man, and that their first occupation must be the saving of their souls and those of their neighbours. But this is to invert the Divine Order and, in consequence, to make their activity fruitless. It was precisely because the Mind of our Lord was set upon His Eternal Father that He saw men and things as they were in reality, not in appearance; because He had no desire but to fulfil the Divine Will that He, the Glory of the Father in eternity, became the Glory of the Father in our human nature, rendering to God that perfect worship, love and service for which man had been created but had refused to give, and so becoming the Redeemer and Saviour of man. It is in this direction of our Lord's Mind that the whole secret of His life, and ours lies.

It is here that the imitation of Christ must begin since only as we possess His Mind toward God shall we have His Mind toward man, only as we are imbued with His spirit may His activity be manifested in our lives.

But how shall this be save as we make that Mind our constant study, the object of our meditation and prayer, that so we may "get to know it by heart," as Ruskin bids art students gain the sense and appreciation of colour by taking an opal and "staring" at it daily, from one angle and in one combination and another?

2. St. John is fully convinced that detachment, mortification and prayer are the dominant factors in the soul's progress toward union with God, since by the first it leaves all that is not God and by the second is made one with Him. That he gives more attention to the first stage of detachment than to the early degrees of prayer, is due not only to the fact that the latter had been amply dealt with by others, but also because so many who gave themselves to prayer neglected the mortification which ought to accompany it and so made little advance toward true spirituality. "Would that I could persuade spiritual persons that this way to God does not consist in the multiplicity of considerations, nor methods, nor consolations, although these, in their own way, may be necessary to beginners; but that it consists in one sole necessary thing, which is to know how to deny oneself truly, both exteriorly and interiorly, giving oneself to suffer for Christ and to annihilate oneself completely. . . . If one is found lacking in this exercise, which is the sum and root of all the virtues, all else is to wander as in a maze, profiting nothing, even though one's meditations and communications may be as high as those of angels" (A. II, vii, 8). A further and even more important reason for the Saint's passing over the elementary stages of the life of prayer is that his main purpose is to lead souls through and beyond the crucial point at which, if progress is to be made, meditation must give way to contemplation. This is, perhaps, the most serious crisis in the spiritual life since "in such seasons it is a difficult and troubling thing for a soul to understand itself

or to find anyone who understands it" (A. Prologue, 4), and St. John is the first to undertake the task and to accomplish it with a clarity and surety which has never been surpassed. But although he is not concerned with the preliminary degrees and varieties of prayer, there are passages scattered throughout his works which refer to and throw light upon them, and these it will be convenient to treat here. As to St. John's teaching about prayer we may note the witness of John of Jesus-Maria Arevalles who made his novitiate in Pastrana whilst the Saint was Novice-Master there. In his *Instruction of Novices*, written at the order of a council of which St. John was a member, he tells us that "following the division which was taught to me in my novitiate and which I saw practised there, I divide prayer (oración) into seven parts, preparation, reading, meditation, contemplation, thanksgiving, petition and conclusion . . . the contemplation which is mentioned here is the end of meditation. . . . All prayer which does not lead to contemplation is dead and sterile." A later writer, Joseph de Jesus-Mary Quiroga, who took the Carmelite habit only four years after the Saint's death in 1591, gives a detailed account of St. John's teaching in his *The gift which St. John possessed in order that he might lead souls to God*, to which we shall return later.

In St. John's own works we find references to the prayer of petition, intercession and meditation. Of the first he says that "in all our necessities, labours and difficulties there remains to us no better or surer means than prayer and hope, that God will provide for us by such ways as He wills" (A. II, xxi, 5). Yet we must not be like those "who seek things more for themselves rather than for the honour of God; for although they suppose that that for which they pray will only be done if it be for the service of God, and not otherwise, yet because of their attachment to it and the vain joy it awakes in them, they multiply petitions for it when it would be much better to change them into prayers for things of much greater importance to them, such as the true cleansing of their consciences, and the understanding of the things

concerning their salvation, postponing till much later all those other petitions which are not of this nature. In this way they would attain that which is of greatest importance to them, and also gain all the other things which are good for them (although they may not have prayed for them), much better and sooner than if all their energy were exerted on them. For so the Lord promised, by the Evangelist, saying, Seek ye first and principally the Kingdom of God and His justice and all these other things shall be added to you. For this is the seeking and petition which is most pleasing to God, and, in order to obtain the answer to the petitions we have at heart there is no better way than to place the force of our prayer to that thing which is most pleasing to God ; for then, not only will He give us that which we ask, which is salvation, but also that which He sees to be fitting and good for us, although we have not asked for it, as David gives us to understand in a Psalm, saying, The Lord is nigh unto them that call upon Him in truth, that ask of Him the things of highest truth, such as those of salvation, for of these he goes on to say : He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him, and will hear their cries, and will save them. For God is the Guardian of those who love Him well. And thus, this nearness of God which David speaks of here is nothing else than His readiness to satisfy them and to grant them even that which they thought not to ask for." So, continues the Saint, was it with Solomon, to whom, since he asked only for wisdom, God granted the things he had not prayed for, and with Abraham likewise. Moreover, he adds, let us not in our prayer go beyond what is approved of and sanctioned by the Catholic Church, seeking the use of new methods as those who " think they know better than the Holy Spirit and His Church. If when they pray in this simplicity God does not hear them, let them not believe that He will hear them for their many inventions. Because God is of such a nature that if they act conformably with it, they will do with Him as they desire ; but if they act for their own ends, they cannot speak with Him. . . . Let not the will be set upon other ceremonies and forms of prayer

than those which Christ has taught us," that is, the Pater-noster, wherein is included all our needs, nor upon much speaking in our prayer since our Father alone knows what is best for us, as our Lord teaches, and insists that we should persevere in prayer, that is, in that of the Paternoster, saying in another place, "It behoves us to pray and never to falter. But he did not teach us a variety of petitions but that these should be frequently repeated with fervour and care. For, I say, in them is contained all the will of God and all that is good for us."

As to the place of prayer our Lord taught that we should pray either in the secret of our own room or in a solitary and desert place, as He Himself did, and so there is no need to fix any limit of time or particular days, or to use any other forms of prayer than those which the Church has authorized. But, goes on the Saint, "I do not condemn but rather approve, the practice which some persons have of arranging special times for their devotions, such as to fast (and make novenas, add some manuscripts), or such like things, but only the habit of being carried away by the methods and ceremonies which they practise" (*A. III, xlv*). Here, as in what he says about the use of oratories, images and articles of devotion such as rosaries and the like, it must be remembered that he is primarily addressing those who have entered the state of contemplation, who although they will still continue the ordinary devotional practices of the faithful will be as rightly detached from them as they are from the use of interior imaginative forms in their approach to God. His own practice, as we know it to have been, is sufficient to indicate the real meaning of his teaching. It is with the essence of that teaching that we are to be most concerned, for this is as necessary now as in his day, when so much of prayer is occupied with ourselves and with things instead of being an attention to God in conformity with our Lord's words, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you." So St. John says that it is our love for God which moves Him to hear our prayer, "The soul calls Him 'Beloved' the

more to move and incline Him to her prayer, for when God is truly loved, He readily hears the prayer of His lover, and then, indeed, can He be called Beloved when the soul is altogether His and its heart is not set on anything outside of Him. Some are there who call Him Beloved when He is not truly so, since their heart is not wholly with Him, so that their prayer has less value in the presence of the Spouse." For we may know that our love for God is what it ought to be if we desire and are content with nothing less than Him (S.C. i, 5, 6).

The angels bear our prayers to God, as Holy Scripture teaches (Tobit xii, 12, etc.), and convey His messages to us, "as good pastors feeding our souls with sweet inspirations and communications from God," and protecting and defending us against the spirits of evil (*ibid.* ii, 3). As to answers to our prayers, "it is to be noted that although it is true that God knows and understands all things, even the least thoughts of the soul, yet He is said to see our necessities and to hear them when He remedies or fulfils them, for not every need or petition reaches such a height that God hears them in such a way as to fulfil them, until in His sight they are sufficient in number and the time and season has come to grant or remedy them." So although God had seen the affliction of His people in Egypt, yet four hundred years passed before He said to Moses, "I have seen the affliction of My people, and have heard their cry; and I have come down to deliver them" (Ex. iii, 7, 8). So also had God heard the prayer of Zacharias but grants it when He sends St. Gabriel to him (Luke i, 13), (S.C. ii, 4). God, that is, always hears our prayer but does not always answer it at once, sometimes because we do not desire sufficiently that which we ask, and by the delay learn how great our need is: sometimes, because what we ask for would not be good for us at the time or in the way that we expect it to be given to us.

In *The Ascent* the Saint emphasizes the danger of our seeking anything from God by unlawful methods, such as those of Spiritualism in any of its forms. For, according to

the Divine government, certain natural and rational limits have been laid down to go beyond which is displeasing to God. Yet, it will be said, that God sometimes answers such prayers. "I answer, that sometimes it is the devil. But when God does answer them, I say that it is because of the weakness of the soul that wishes to go by that road, in order that it may not be disconsolate and turn back, or think that God is angry with it, or for other ends which are known to God, founded in the weakness of the soul, because of which God sees fit to respond and to condescend to that way." He goes on to illustrate this exquisite tenderness of God to all who seek Him by showing that He deals in the same manner with those who desire sensible sweetness in devotion and prayer, often granting them such favours, not because He is pleased with such desires or methods, but because He has compassion upon their weakness and treats each of His creatures according to their nature. "For God is as a fountain, from which each one draws water according to the vessel he carries . . . and thus, at times He condescends to the desire and prayer of some souls, because of their goodness and simplicity, not willing to leave them without succour, lest they should be saddened." But this must not be taken to mean that it is lawful "to draw water by extraordinary channels," but only that God, in His mercy, can do as He wills without His condescension being regarded as giving us any right to presume upon it. And "the wish to know anything by supernatural (extraordinary) means is much worse than the desire" for sensible devotion, and is of the matter at least of venial sin. "For there is no necessity for anything of this sort, since there is a natural reason and an evangelical law and doctrine which are entirely sufficient for the directing of ourselves, and there is no difficulty or necessity which cannot be solved and remedied by these means, which are according to God's desire and the profit of souls; and we must make so great use of reason and evangelical doctrine, that whatever may be told us supernaturally (i.e. in some extraordinary way), whether we desire it or not, we must alone receive that which

conforms to reason and evangelical law. And so to receive it, not because it is revealed, but because it is reason, leaving aside all attention to it as revealed ; and even then it will be well to look at and examine that reason very much more than if there had not been some revelation concerning it, since the devil, in order to deceive, makes use of many things that are true, and that will happen, and that are conformable to reason " (A. II, xxi, 1-5 ; cf. xviii, 7-8). The appositeness of this teaching and of that in the following chapter concerning the one and final revelation that God has made by His Word, Jesus Christ, to the many pseudo-mystic and semi-Christian cults of to-day is well seen. St. John sees that the real danger lies not in the falsity but in the measure of truth which they contain, that were there not " something in " Spiritualism, for instance, it would not be possible for it to " deceive even the very elect." It is precisely because the devil can " disguise himself as an angel of light " and has an immense knowledge at his disposal that he can make known certain things and answer certain prayers in order to lead souls away from the paths of reason and faith. So however striking and near to truth may any revelation be, whether of departed spirits, Mrs. Eddy, the Theosophists and Occultists, Joseph Smith, the Apostle of Mormonism, or the various " adepts " who attract such insecure minds as those of Rom Landau, Karl Bruten or Bengal Lancer, all must be brought to the test of reason and faith, and if found to be true, are to be accepted, not because of the revelation but because of their conformity with reason and with the truth once for all revealed in Christ. The careful study of these two chapters of *The Ascent* will be found to be of great value in dealing with those who are attracted to, as thousands are, the many cults of our time, the chief condemnation of which is the fact that they either ignore God or make Him but an accessory to human needs, and that they deny the unique Personality and work of our Lord. In commenting upon the line

Tell ye Him that I languish, suffer and die

of the second stanza of *The Spiritual Canticle*, the Saint bids us note that the soul here does no more than to represent its need to God, for the discreet lover "cares not to beg for that which she lacks and desires but only manifests her need, so that the Beloved may do that which seems good to Him," as when the blessed Virgin, at the marriage feast at Cana of Galilee, spake to her beloved Son, not begging directly for wine, but only saying, "They have no wine"; and the sisters of Lazarus, who sent to Him, not asking Him to heal their brother, but only to say, "See he whom Thou lovest is sick." There are three reasons why it is better for us to make our petitions in this manner. First, because our Lord knows our needs better than we do; second, because He has more compassion when He sees that we are resigned to His will; and third, because the soul is in greater security with regard to her love and acts more properly in simply expressing her need than in begging that which she believes herself to lack.

As to the place where prayer is best made the Saint teaches that it is both lawful and expedient for beginners to use and find sensible devotion in images, oratories, churches, since they are yet in a state of spiritual childhood and are not weaned or detached from the use of sensible things. But the spiritual person grows out of the need of these things, becoming content with interior recollection and resting in God alone. So it is best to pray where both sense and spirit are least hindered in going to God. Churches are indeed set apart for prayer (and, we may add, afford the only quiet and fitting places which thousands of people to-day can find for prayer), but solitary and bare places, such as our Lord chose upon the mountain-side and in the desert, being free from anything which may distract the senses, enable the spirit to rise upward to God Himself. Here, as in other matters, the aim of the spiritual man is not to be tied down or attached to any place or manner of prayer, so that he may pray always and everywhere. St. John mentions three places which he thinks aid devotion, a pleasant and quiet garden, such as Luis de San Angel tells us the Saint loved to pray in at Granada; some place where God has

afforded His special favour, which He grants "when and where and in what manner as is pleasing to Him," for although He is not bound to any place, it would appear that He wills to be adored in such places as those in which His favours have been given, and in which the remembrance of them stirs the will to devotion ; and any place which He has specially chosen that He may be called upon and served there, as at Sinai, where He gave the law and the like.

We turn now to the subject of meditation which the Saint says is exercised by the two interior bodily senses, imagination and phantasy, which are ordered one to the other ; "for the one reasons by imagining, and the other forms the imagination, or what is imagined, by the exercise of the phantasy." The two terms are practically synonymous, and St. John uses them as so. "All that these senses can receive and fashion, are called imaginations and phantasies, which are forms represented to these senses by bodily images and figures," i.e. forms or pictures drawn from things known to the five exterior senses. This may take place supernaturally by means of visions or other communications which the soul receives passively, or naturally, by an activity of its own reflecting upon Divine things and presenting them to itself under images or notions derived from the things of the visible world. For the imagination can only picture what can be perceived by the outward senses, in the same way that if an artist desires to paint a picture of heaven he can only do so by representing it under some material form, or as St. John the Divine does in word-pictures in the Apocalypse.

Meditation, then, "is a discursive act exercised by means of images, forms and figures produced and imagined by the said senses, as when we imagine Christ crucified or bound to the column or in another of the stations ; or God seated in great majesty upon a throne ; or when we consider and imagine glory to be a most beautiful light, and so on." Such meditation is very necessary for beginners, teaches St. John, in order that they may be fired with love for and feed their souls by such exercise of the senses upon the truth of Divine

realities ; but it must be known that they are but remote or indirect means to our union with God, through which ordinarily the soul must pass in order to reach the goal ; they are stairs by which the soul ascends, which if it remained upon it would never reach the summit (*A. II, xii, 3, 4, 5*). They dispose the soul towards spirituality, they do not bring it to that true spirituality which alone suffices for union with God (*ibid. xiii, 1*).

In three places the Saint gives what may be called an outline meditation. The first is upon the evil which befalls the soul in setting its will upon the good things of this life. He calls it an instruction necessary against this poison. " As soon as the heart feels itself moved by this vain joy in natural goods, let it remember how empty a thing it is to rejoice in any other thing than the service of God, how perilous and pernicious ; considering how great an evil was it for the angels to rejoice and delight themselves in their beauty and natural endowments, since by this they fell into the abyss of shame ; considering also how many evils come to men daily through this same vanity, and so by such consideration to resolve in good time to take the remedy which the poet advises to those who are beginning to have affection for such things. Make haste now to use the remedy in the beginning, for when evil things have had time to grow in the heart, remedy and medicine come too late " (*A. III, xxii, 6*).

In *The Spiritual Canticle* he describes the steps of the soul's journey from self to God through meditation upon the creatures which, after the knowledge of self, holds the first place in the soul's seeking after the knowledge of God, since as the Apostle says, The invisible things of God are known by the soul through the created things of the universe. So in stanza 4 the soul cries—

Oh, woods and thickets
Planted by the hand of the Beloved !
Oh, meadow of verdure,
Enamelled with flowers,
Say if by you He has passed !

This question marks the beginning of the soul's journey by means of consideration upon and knowledge of created things, the stanza containing such consideration of the elements and other lower things and of the heavens with the other creatures and material things that God has created therein, also upon the celestial spirits. In the following stanza the creatures make answer—

Scattering a thousand graces,
He passed by these groves in haste,
And, beholding them as He went
By His glance alone
Left them clothed with beauty.

For they bear in their nature that witness to the greatness and excellence of God "for which the soul asked in its consideration" of them. The Saint's exposition of this stanza is as saturated with the meaning of creation as the language he uses is full of beauty. Not only, he says, did God create all things by giving being to nothingness (*dádoles el ser de nada*), and this in an innumerable diversity, but endowed them with countless graces and virtues, giving them the beauty of an admirable order and inter-dependence through the wisdom in which He created them, that is, His only begotten Son, the Word "by whom all things were made," scattering among them a thousand graces wherewith they are found to be full of virtue, agents of their own generation and conservation, whilst all bear the imprint of the greatness, power, wisdom and beauty of the Creator, "every common bush afire with God."

So from the lesser works which God made, as it were in swift passage, the soul rises to the consideration of those greater ones, "the Incarnation of the Word and the mysteries of the Christian Faith in comparison with which all the rest were made, as it were, in passing and in haste," the Word in whom alone God beheld all things and in that gaze gave them their natural being, since as St. Thomas says, all things exist because God knows them, and made them "very good." So still more when He was made man, clothing man with the beauty of God, He raised all creatures

in man since in uniting Himself with man He united Himself with the nature of all things.

By this ascending the stairs of meditation the soul, "wounded in love by this trace of the beauty of her Beloved which she has known in creatures, anxiously desires to see that invisible beauty in itself," and cries—

Ah, who alone can heal me !
Surrender Thou Thyself all-wholly.
Send Thou me from to-day
No other messenger,
Who cannot tell me what I desire.

The third outline will be found in the *Annotation* to the second version of *The Spiritual Canticle*, and has been already quoted in chap. ix. Here, indeed, we have the enumeration of a number of subjects, suitable for the consideration of a soul awakened to the truth of its condition and place, each one of which is full of profit.

A detailed account of St. John's teaching upon the early stages of prayer is given by Quiroga in the early chapters of the treatise already mentioned (*vide* p. 207). Our Holy Father, he writes, does not deal with the subject of meditation in his writings, but assumes the necessity of it as the ordinary path to contemplation. In teaching his disciples he divided meditation into three parts, the representation of the mystery chosen as the subject, the consideration, and the loving attention to God. The first is the work of the imagination, the second of the reason, and the third, the quiet and loving intent of the soul upon God in which it gathers the fruit of the preceding activities. Dionysius is quoted as advising that the first should not occupy much time, since it is less valuable than the others, and if persisted in too long may only produce weariness and headache. The second serves to the perfecting of the natural knowledge of the soul, aiding the understanding and appreciation of Divine mysteries, from which the soul passes to the calm, loving and desiring act of supernatural faith. "In the first two parts the soul disposes itself to pray and to speak with God, but if it does not pass on to the third, it will neither pray

nor speak with God, but only with itself." St. John insisted greatly that the work of the representation of the subject should be exercised moderately and briefly, so that the soul might pass quickly from particular things conceived under corporal forms by the imagination to rest in the spiritual and universal realities. More time might profitably be spent upon the consideration, that is, the meditation properly so-called, as for instance, in a meditation upon the Passion, we should dwell upon the greatness of the mercy of the Son of God, upon the great indignities which He endured for those who had offended Him by sin, with other circumstances of the Passion; for whom He suffered, how He suffered, the love with which He suffered, etc.; the abominable malice of sin: all to be accompanied with a growing compassion, sorrow for sin, and an attention to the lessons to be learnt from the Cross that we may seek to imitate the virtues so heroically resplendent there.

From such active consideration the soul, moved by God, ought to pass to one more illuminated, raising itself from the activity of the reason to the simple light of faith, which comes to pass when the soul ceases its own intellectual operation of thinking and reasoning and remains devotedly attentive to God in love, which is nothing else but the activity of the will choosing God as its Supreme Good. The more this act is continuous, the more efficacious is it, as St. Thomas illustrates by the example of a thing becoming hotter the longer it remains in the sunlight or before the fire. This is the perfection of meditation, from whence opens the door to the Divine illumination and disposes the soul to be moved by God to the truly supernatural in and by which, supernatural spiritual effects may be wrought in it.

This teaching is, of course, but that of all the great masters of the spiritual life, but we can see how that in St. John it is all dominated by the end for which, with his master, St. Thomas, he knows man to have been created and all the gifts of truth and grace to have been given, that is, the contemplation of God. Contrary to much modern practice, the thinking part of mental prayer occupies but a

slight place compared with that loving attention to God which is the highest activity that the rational creature is capable of by his own efforts aided by grace, that act which in our time is known as the Prayer of Simplicity and acquired contemplation. It is from this step that the Saint treats of the heights which lay beyond but to which the way is barred by our natural incapacity. True, the intellect was created to see God, who alone is its adequate Object, but it is incapable of that sight unless God grant it the gift of infused contemplation which, as we are to see, far from actually inhibiting the operation of the intellect, enables the highest activity possible to it in this life and in that to come.

IT will be remembered that by the term "senses," as used by St. John, we are to understand the lower part and activity of the soul, that is both the exterior five bodily senses and the interior senses, imagination, memory, etc., with the emotions which they produce in the soul and which overflow, as it were, into the body. Above these is the rational, higher part of the soul, with its faculties of the intellect, memory and will, which although they need the senses for all the normal activity of this life are not entirely dependent upon them, and only attain the perfection of their activity in an act to which the lower part of the soul contributes nothing, although by reason of its having been brought into perfect union with the higher part it shares in the effects of that act.

To understand St. John, then, we have to resist the tendency to think of soul and body as two separate entities in some way joined together, side by side, as it were, instead of seeing the soul as the principle of all our activity, spiritual or corporal, the "form" which, as Spenser says, "makes the body" and determines human nature to be the unity that it is. So, too, we must resist the even commoner idea of the soul as a part of our nature exclusively designed for the purposes of religion in something of the way in which each organ of the body has its particular function. This modern misconception is peculiarly dangerous as it tends to make the soul little more than an *ensemble* of the emotions, and to forget that its highest faculties and activities are those of the intellect and the will, that the distinctive characteristic of man is not that he is a feeling, emotional creature, but a rational and willing one, and that the highest aim of religion is to save and recreate the mind, not the emotions which are consequent upon the activity of the mind. A great deal of confusion upon this point has been caused by a misunderstanding of the sense in which the term "heart" is

used in Holy Scripture, and to the bad habit of translators in using that term when "mind" is what is meant, as in Colossians iii, 2, where "Set your affections" should be "Set your minds . . .," or in the Collect for Lady Day where the Latin has *mentibus nostris*, not "hearts" as in the common English version.

The Night of the Senses, then, has two parts, that which we have considered, in which by the ordinary practices and exercises of the Christian life the soul detaches itself from the desires for all that which attracts the exterior senses; and that to which we now come, which is given the additional title of The Night of Faith, in which the detachment of the soul extends to the interior senses and the faculties of intellect, memory and will. This Night is first described from the point of view of the soul's activity aided by grace, and then, in *The Dark Night*, from the point of view of the act of God by the gift of infused contemplation which the soul receives passively and, as was said in chap. viii, in ever-increasing power as the double current of the soul's activity and of the Divine operation blends into one wherein God does all in the soul entirely surrendered to Him.

Chaps. xiv and xv of the first, together with chap. i of the second, book of *The Ascent* are concerned with a brief review of the meaning of the first stanza of the poem, the commentary upon which occupies the whole of book one—

In a dark night
Love-inflamed with yearnings
Oh, happy chance!
Unobserved went I forth
My house being now at rest.

The first line, says the Saint, treats of the Night of the sensitive part of the soul, and how it is to be entered upon and passed through so that "love-inflamed" the soul may press on to union with the Beloved. It is this love which has enabled the soul to essay the early stages of the way, for unless the spiritual part of the soul were so moved by these yearnings of desire for God, it would never be able to overcome the desires of the sensitive nature drawn so strongly as

they are to sensible things, nor have courage to bear the darkness of an entire detachment from them. But now the first stage has been passed, and the soul sings of its delivery from the captivity of the senses, "its house being now at rest," undisturbed by any clamour of the senses, which have been put to sleep by the self-denial and mortification which the soul has given itself to that it might go forth "to true liberty, to rejoice in the union with its Beloved."

Yet all that so far has been done is but the preparation for the necessary task of "denuding the spirit of all spiritual imperfections and desires that it may come into the possession of spiritual goods." So this second book treats of the proximate or direct means of attaining to union with God, the which means is faith, in the exercise of which the soul must journey on in an even greater darkness than it has yet experienced, seeking with faith as its guide "spiritual detachment from all things," that it may desire nothing, either of sense or spirit, but God Himself alone (*A. ii, 1*). We come here to the heart of the Saint's doctrine and shall do well to pause and consider and compare it with the popular view of what the spiritual life is and requires. All Christians would acknowledge the necessity of the detachment of the exterior senses and a due control of the mind, imagination and memory such as would guard against the temptations which constantly assail the soul. They would confess the need of a regular observance of Christian duties and obligations, of grace sought for by prayer and in the sacraments, and of such imitation of our Lord as was possible and compatible with their state of life. The more devout would practise all this with a greater regularity and earnestness, give themselves to Mental Prayer, frequent reception of the sacraments, spiritual reading, a more generous mortification and the pursuit of good works. They would be commonly regarded as "advanced" Christians, St. John calls them "beginners," regarding them not from the point of view of their attainment but from that of the end, union with God. He sees them as in the foothills of the Mount, those indeed who have entered by the strait gate, but have yet to set foot in the narrow way which

ascends the high mountain of perfection, and, being narrow, "requires such travellers as are neither weighed down with any burden as of inferior things, nor with higher things *in such a way* as should embarrass them, since this is a journey in which God alone is to be sought and attained" (A. II, vii, 3). To this end "our Lord, instructing and leading us upon this way, taught us, in the seventh chapter of St. Mark, that so admirable doctrine of which I think it may be said that the more necessary it is for spiritual persons, the less it is practised by them." Our Lord's words are: "If any man will to follow Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and come after Me. For he that will save his life shall lose it; but he that loses his life for My sake shall find it." "Oh, that some one might enable us to understand 'right now,' and practise and experience what this counsel is which our Saviour here gives us of denying our very selves, in order that spiritual persons might see how different is the manner in which they ought to ascend this way from that which many of them think it to be. Some believe that any manner of retirement and reformation in things is sufficient; others content themselves in some degree of exercising themselves in the virtues, continuing in prayer and pursuing mortification; but attain not to detachment and poverty of spirit, abnegation, or spiritual purity (which are all one) that our Lord here counsels: for before all they seek to feed and clothe their nature with consolations and spiritual sentiments, rather than to denuding and denying it in all things for God. For they think that it is sufficient to deny themselves in the things of the world without annihilating and purifying themselves of attachment to that which is spiritual. Thus it arises that if anything solid and perfect offers itself to them, such as the annihilation of all sensible delight in God, in aridity, pain and labour, which is the true spiritual cross and the detachment of the spiritual poverty of Christ, they flee from it as from death, seeking only sweetnesses, and pleasurable communion with God. This is not denial of self and detachment of spirit, but spiritual gluttony. . . . For to seek oneself in God is to seek the gifts and refreshments of

God ; but to seek God in oneself is not only to desire to do without both of these for God, but to incline oneself to choose for Christ all that is most distasteful, whether of God or of the world, and this is love of God " (*A. II, vii, 5*).

[It must not be thought that this demand for an entire detachment from every kind of spiritual consolation, sensible devotion, sentiments and feelings originates in St. John.] It is the common teaching of all the great masters of the spiritual life, examples of which are frequent in such well-known writers as St. Augustine and Thomas à Kempis, the former of whom says in one place, " He who seeks from God anything less than God esteems the gifts of God more than the Giver. Hath God, then, no reward? None, save Himself." And à Kempis, " A generous lover resteth not in the gift, but in Me, above every gift." The lover " looketh not at the gifts, but turneth himself, above all gifts, to the Giver." " Are not all they to be called hirelings who are ever seeking consolations? "

The state of beginners, says St. John, is that of those who " meditate in the spiritual way," and have reached that point in which God desires to admit them into the " state of proficients which is that of those who are already contemplatives, in order that, having passed through this, they may arrive at the state of the perfect, that of the Divine union of the soul with God " (*D.N. i, 1*). To this end they are led to enter the Night of Sense, that is of the interior senses, which they do both actively and passively, the active way consisting in the soul's efforts to still the operation of the interior senses and faculties, the passive in its becoming more and more patient to and receptive of the operation of God. The necessity of this night, which " is common and comes to many, these are beginners " (*D.N. I, viii, 1*), arises from three reasons :

First, the imperfections to be found in these beginners.

Second, The need of freeing the interior senses and the faculties of the soul from the activity which in reality hinders the highest operation of the intellect and will.

Third, and so to prepare for the Night of the Spirit which

is the "principal part of the purgation of the soul," passing through which the whole nature, sensitive and spiritual, being "reformed, ordered and set at rest" in an entire harmony and unity of all its powers "may go forth to the Divine union of Love."

St. John deals with the first of these reasons in several places (*A.*, Prologue, II, vii ; III, ix ; III, xxviii ; XXXIV-XLIII). His teaching may be briefly summed up as follows. God leads the soul according to its nature, treating it as a parent his child, so beginning with its immature state of spiritual childhood and attracting it to those exterior things which in this state it is alone capable of appreciating and using, in order that it may grow up and grow out of dependence upon such things, which are but remote means leading to and training the soul in an understanding and desire for the more spiritual things suitable to its growth toward maturity. "In this manner, then, God goes on instructing and making the soul more spiritual, beginning by communicating the spiritual to it by means of outward things, palpable and suited to sense, according to the soul's weakness and incapacity, in order that, by means of the outer rind of these things of sense which in themselves are good, the spirit (that is, the highest part of the soul) may make particular acts and receive so many morsels of spiritual communications, that it will come to have a habit of the spiritual and attain to actual, substantial spirituality, which is far different to anything of sense" (*A.* II, xvii, 5). But the very goodness of these elementary things and ways becomes a danger when the soul, having become habituated in the use of them, becomes attached to them, and to the sensible and spiritual devotion they arouse, failing to see that they are but means which should be used only so long as they are necessary, and in relation to the end for which they are designed, that is, that union with God which they prepare the soul for but do not enable it to attain. Such attachment brings about various evils and imperfections which hinder the soul's advance toward true spirituality, the nature of which imperfections the Saint especially treats

in the early chapters of *The Dark Night* with a clarity of psychological knowledge which has never been equalled. Before coming to this we may note how this attachment to outward means and the sensible devotion they awaken in the soul harms the soul in the matter of the use of such means as images, pictures, rosaries, oratories, festivals, pilgrimages, ceremonies, novenas and the like, the right use of which the Church has approved yet which, like all good things, are capable of abuse in ways the Saint emphatically condemns. For the charge often made against the practices of the Church, that they are dangerous by reason of the appeal they make to the sensible and æsthetic side of man's nature, is true enough although the reason given is false. It is not because such an appeal is wrong in itself but precisely because it is so good and necessary since the Faith is meant for man as a whole and salvation is of his whole being, not merely of his soul. The danger lies in the tendency to rest in the means, regarding the use of them and the devotion they are designed to arouse as the end for which they exist, instead of being the ways by which we are to be raised to God upon and in whom our desire should rest.

Images and pictures, says St. John, are ordained that we may reverence the Saints, and to excite the devotion of our wills to imitate their virtues. It is this that we must seek in our use of them, not the worth or decoration of them, directing our devotion to the Saint represented, not to the image which is but an aid to this. It is from this point of view of devotion being paid to the person represented, not to the representation, that St. John condemns the interest some take in clothing images with garments which "vain persons invent to satisfy their own pastime and vanity . . . reducing devotion to a dressing of dolls . . . using images as little more than idols upon which they set their delight. . . . The truly devout person sets his devotion principally upon that which is invisible, has need of but few images and uses them little . . . nor in his use is his heart attached to them, for, if they are taken away

from him, he sorrows very little, since he seeks within himself the living image of Christ crucified for whom he rather desires that all things should be taken from him." In a word, all such things are instruments which must be used solely as "aids to" devotion, but which, owing to our imperfection, may become a hindrance just as may attachment to anything else. Indeed the former may be more dangerous, since the person concerned may come to think that since the object—in the case of images, etc.,—is holy, he need not fear to become attached to it, whereas his pleasure in it is only due to natural desire and temperament which incline him to this as to purely worldly things.

"Much might be said as to the stupidity which many exhibit with regard to images," as when they place more confidence in one than in another, imagining that God hears them more readily when they pray before, say, our Lady of this rather than our Lady of that. If God at times grants favours by means of one image or place more than another, it is not because of any virtue in the image or because it is more beautiful but because it serves to arouse more devotion in some persons. As a matter of fact, God seems to grant more favours and miracles by means of images which have little beauty, so that the faithful may not think that they are due to the image or picture itself. Nor must it be thought that any extraordinary or supernatural happening which takes place in connection with images and shrines is certainly of God. "For one of the means with which the devil easily catches uncautious souls and hinders them in the way of spiritual truth, is by extraordinary and supernatural things, which he manifests by images, either those material and corporal ones used by the Church, or in those which he is given to fix in the phantasy concerning this or that Saint or his image, transforming himself into an angel of light in order to deceive." There have been sufficient instances even since St. John's day to give point to his words. Hence, in order to avoid all the evils which may befall the soul in these matters, "let the faithful soul take care that, in beholding an image, he desires not to

have his senses absorbed in it, whether it be corporeal or imaginative, beautifully made or richly adorned, whether it causes sensible or spiritual devotion, exhibit supernatural manifestations or no, but paying no attention to these accidents or even regarding them, raising his mind to that which the image represents, placing the essence and joy of his will, with the prayer and devotion of his spirit, in God, or in the Saint invoked, for that which belongs to the living reality and spirit ought not to be given to the picture or to the senses" (A. III, xxxvii).

We ever desire to cling to things, and this is seen in the weakness which some indulge with regard to rosaries, being attached to one of particular workmanship or beauty, as if, apart from the indulgence granted to it, God cared for one more than another, or as if His hearing of our prayer depended on anything but upon its utterance by a simple and true heart. So also many spend time and take pleasure in arranging their places of prayer, yet do not love God any the more because of this which is rather for their own delight. True, sacred things should be treated with respect, and those who possess them deserve reproof if they do not do so, "as are those who have such ill-made images that they rather destroy devotion than increase it, for which reason those who are defective and unlearned in this art should be forbidden to practise it." But, alas, they have not been, though there is another side to the question, as M. Claudel insists in *Ways and Crossways*, for it is not always the most exquisite example of Christian art that evokes the most real devotion, as St. John, who was given to making rough pictures of holy things, would himself admit.

Festivals, too, may be and are easily abused when they become opportunities for pleasure, for "seeing and being seen, eating and drinking" and the like, instead of the worship of God and the honouring of His mysteries. (Yet let not the Englishman who treats holy days as mere holidays venture to rebuke the simple joy of a Catholic people at some local festa.)

Of pilgrimages he advises that they should be made

alone, not with a crowd, since, as a rule, people return from such more distracted than when they set out, many making them more for recreation than out of devotion. "Where there is devotion and faith any image is sufficient; where there is none, none are sufficient." As to ceremonies let those approved by the Church suffice: "the great reliance which some place in many kinds of ceremonies introduced by ignorant folk, lacking the simplicity of faith, is insufferable." Leaving aside those which are of sin and even imply a secret compact with the devil, he is probably referring to relics of pagan superstition, or to practices derived from Moorish sources and mixed up with Catholic practice; he speaks only of the ways in which some people imagine that the good of their particular devotions depends upon the very exact performance of them more than upon the sincerity of the prayer which accompanies them. As, for instance, to demand that there should be a certain number of candles at a particular Mass, or that it should be said in a certain way, on a particular day, at such an hour, etc., all of which is great foolishness. And it is worse when people expect, because of this attention to exterior things and ways, to have their prayers answered, or to feel some effect in themselves, which is nothing less than to tempt God. These last chapters of *The Ascent*, of which the above is but a brief digest, should not only be read carefully but read in the light of the following considerations. The canonization of a Saint and the Church's approval of his writings does not imply that he is infallible, or that all he says is of equal importance, or is applicable to all persons. St. John, it is true, more than once guards himself against misinterpretation upon these matters (*vide* A. III, xv, 3; xxxv, 2, 3; xxxvii, 1; xxxix, 1), and, as we know, was addressing those who were seeking such a total detachment as he describes throughout his works; but this did not save him from being accused to the Holy Office as an Illuminist, upon which charge he was ably and successfully defended by Fray Basilio Ponce de León, whose reply is given in full in Professor Peer's translation of P. Silverio's edition of the Saint's works. Dealing

with St. John's references to images, to which exception had been taken, Fray Basilio answers that the Saint "clearly teaches the respect which we owe to images, and the position they occupy in the Church. He only says that they are not necessary to the contemplative for his contemplation; the affections being already set on fire, images are of no use to him since he has the truth itself. This is not to condemn their use but merely to show that they are of little use at a certain time. . . . As for the clothing of images in secular garments, this has been rebuked in many councils."

We must remember, too, the Saint's own practice. Brocard of St. Peter tells how at Calvario St. John used to carve wooden figures of our Lord; Brother Gabriel of the Mother of God, who was sacristan at Baeza, relates how one Christmas he had a statue of our Lady carried in procession through the convent to the Crib in the Church which, as later at Granada, he had helped to decorate, and that during recreation he took the Bambino in his arms and began to dance and sing

Mi dulce y tierno Jesús
Si amores, me han de matar
Ahora tienen lugar.

At Los Martires he had pictures painted for the cloister, and gave a gilt figure of the Holy Child to the Carmelite nuns, which is still venerated. His devotion to our Lady was especially marked, and he always exercised the utmost care in carrying out the prescribed ceremonies of the Church.

It is, then, in the whole context of his life and teaching that these chapters must be understood, his one aim being to detach the will from every creature that it might cleave in love to God alone. "For the cause for which alone God is to be served is that He is Who He is, and not for any other intermediate ends. Thus, not to serve Him solely because of Who He is, is to serve Him without thought of the final Cause that He is" (A. III, xxxviii, 3).

The first reason for the necessity of the Night of Faith is that the soul having rid itself of affection for things of the world, has now to learn to detach itself from affection for

and sensible consolation in spiritual things, in order that with the Psalmist, it may have but one desire, "to see the fair beauty of the Lord." For although it has made much progress in the conquest of the passions and growth in virtue, even to finding its delight in "passing much time—perhaps whole nights—in prayer, taking pleasure in penances, its satisfactions in fasting, and its consolations in the use of the sacraments and in communication with Divine things," yet it is still spiritually very weak and imperfect. And this is largely due to the fact that all this activity of the soul is so motivated by the sensible delight which it finds in the practice of religion which, whilst it has its place, yet becomes a hindrance when the love for these things obscures the truth that God must be loved for Himself alone, not for what He has done or given to us. St. John would show us how we are to escape from the snare of becoming spoilt children, ever clamouring for and delighting in the gifts of our Father rather than in Himself. Nor is he content with barely stating the fact, with a relentless hand he fills in the details in those chapters of *The Dark Night* (ii-vii), in which he describes the state of beginners in relation to the seven deadly sins, not as actually committed, for he assumes that they are practically beyond this, but as expressed in various imperfections which impede their further progress, giving a more perfect plan of an examen of conscience for practising Christians than any to be found in modern books of devotion. Few, indeed, if any will there be who will not find here a more true self-knowledge, so far as faults are concerned, than anywhere else. The *exposé* is as complete as it is shattering to our innate vanity and self-love. We begin to understand our Lord's words about "unprofitable servants," and those of the prophet, "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."

As to pride, although holy things should cause humility, our very fervour and diligence tends to create a certain self-satisfaction, such as we see come to a head in the Pharisee. Hence a vain desire to talk of spiritual things and to teach others rather than to learn them ourselves (a special

temptation of beginners, says St. Teresa), and an interior condemning of those who have not a similar devotion to ours. A puritanical eye upon the faults of our neighbour, such as our Lord speaks of in the parables of the mote and the beam, and the gnat and the camel. The devil often aids all this by quickening sensible fervour, as he is able to do since his knowledge and power reach to the lower part of the soul (*vide D.N.* II, xxiii, 2-4). Such souls easily fall into the snare of imagining that their confessor does not understand them or that he is unspiritual, because he does not commend their behaviour, and so seek others who will esteem them at their own valuation. They are given to trying to impress others with their devotion, which they exhibit by outward signs in order that they may be noticed and praised. They like to be intimate with their confessors, from which arises all sorts of occasions of envy and disquietude; and often, ashamed of their sins, either make excuses for and endeavour to cover them up or seek another confessor for their more serious faults. Some are always going from one extreme to another, either to presumption in making little of their sins, or to despondency, becoming sad and angry with themselves because they are not what they imagined themselves to be. They beg God to take away their faults, not for His sake, but for their own peace and comfort, not seeing that if He did so, they would probably become more presumptuous and vain. There is hardly anyone who, at this period of fervour, does not fall into some of these faults which unless seen and checked will develop into more serious ones.

But, as Dom Chapman has said, "Fervour consists in dissatisfaction with ourselves" (Letter lxi). "Of course, we can't be saints without feeling we are pigs" (*ibid.* xvi). So, says St. John, those who are going on to perfection proceed by the path of true humility, thinking nothing of themselves and what they do, knowing how little all is compared with what God deserves of them, and are so occupied with Him that they have no time or desire to notice others, or if they do, only to think them better than them-

selves. Thus they wish not for esteem or praise but to be known for what they are, are anxious to learn not to teach, do not dream that their way must be best, and are ready to be guided by their directors even when they set them in a different way, are anxious to be frank about their sins and never speak of their possible virtues since these seem to them to be of no account. Yet they bear their imperfections with an humble and loving fear of God, the more confident in Him as they distrust themselves.

As to avarice considered in a spiritual sense, it is to be found in those who are discontented and grieved because they do not find all the comfort they think they have a right to expect from spiritual things. (This, of course, will be so if they are seeking, as many do, the wrong kind of comfort in religion.) So they run about from one preacher or book to another, "ever learning and never coming to the knowledge of the truth," as St. Paul says; are ever changing their devotional practices, deck themselves with rosaries, crosses, medals, relics, "like children with trinkets," setting their hearts and spending their time on these things rather than seeking poverty of spirit and self-denial. "For true devotion is of the heart and consists alone of the truth and substance of what is represented by spiritual things; everything else is attachment and affection due to imperfection, which must be got rid of in order to pass to any kind of perfection." This cannot be done by the soul itself but only by God in the passive purgation of the dark Night of the Spirit, yet the soul must do what it can to purify and perfect itself in order that it may merit being placed by God in that Divine care in which it is healed of all that of which it cannot heal itself. For however much the soul seeks to aid itself, it cannot actively purify itself to such a degree as to be the least disposed for the Divine union of the perfection of love, if God takes not the hand and purges it in that dark fire in the way and manner we have yet to speak of.

In treating of the sin of *luxuria* the Saint gives most valuable help to the understanding of certain phenomena

of the spiritual life which often cause great distress to souls, and are not infrequently dealt with wrongly because of ignorance concerning the cause from which they spring.

It often happens that when a soul is occupied in spiritual exercises, at prayer or in the reception of the sacraments, and even at the moment of receiving Holy Communion, just when, says St. John, "it is not within its power to prevent it, impure movements and acts arise and present themselves in the sensitive part of the soul," although there is no desire much less yielding of the will to such sensual feelings. They are not, repeats the Saint, within our power, and may proceed from three causes. First, from the pleasure which human nature has in spiritual things. "For when both spirit and sense are pleased, every part of a man is moved by that pleasure to delight according to its nature and inclination (*su porcion y propiedad*). So then the spirit, which is the higher part of the soul, is moved to pleasure and delight in God; and the sensitive nature, which is the lower part, is moved to pleasure and delight of the senses, because it does not know how to hold to and possess anything else, and so it takes that which is most conjoined to itself, which is of the sensual. Thus it comes to pass that the soul is engaged in prayer with God according to the spirit, and, on the other hand, according to the senses it passively experiences rebellions, movements and acts of a sensual nature, not without great displeasure, the which often happens during Communion, for when in this act of love the soul receives gladness and comfort from this Lord (for this is the reason He gives Himself) the lower, sensitive part of the soul also takes gladness in its own way, as we have said" (*D.N.* I, iv, 2). The explanation of this, continues the Saint, is that sense and spirit form one nature, so that each participates in that which is received by either one of them, each in its own manner, for as the philosophers say "everything that is received is in the recipient according to the manner of the recipient. In the cases under consideration that which happens is that the soul being yet imperfect, its nature not fully harmonized and restored

to that unity in which the sensitive and spiritual parts are entirely one, when any spiritual activity is in process, the emotions, which are of the sensitive part, may be moved to seek satisfaction in their own way, which is of the senses.

This fact is, of course, familiar to all students of religious experience, whether in groups or in the individual. The records of high moments of religious exaltation such as are common to all cults, especially as manifested in mass movements, revivals and popular functions, are full of the expression of this fact in the grossest manner. In the individual the combination of a sincere religious faith and fervour with strong sensual desires is well known, and the oscillation between one and the other is no indication of hypocrisy or insincerity but only of that divided state of human nature consequent upon original sin, the loss of that gift of Divine grace which, uniting man to God, unites him in himself.

St. John, as he expressly states, is not here concerned with this gross aspect of the case, but only with those unwelcome manifestations of the lower nature which in moments of spiritual tension, affect the body or imagination or both, and have no actual sin in them since they cannot be avoided and are repudiated by the will. Due as they are to the imperfection of human nature, they emphasize the need of the soul to free itself so far as is possible to it, from any attachment to sensible feelings of devotion, and of entering into that night in which God Himself makes our nature at one again. A second cause of these sensual movements is the devil, whose object is not so much to lead the souls into sin but to so disturb and distract it, that it may possibly give up its spiritual exercises because, as they say, they are more subject to these rebellions of sense than at other times. This is true, but it is hard to see why anyone should be astonished at it, except for the fact of the common but erroneous opinion that prayer ought to be easy and full of consolation. Prayer being the soul's greatest need and work, the devil is most likely to seize any opportunity of tempting souls to abandon it, and in this case the temptation

is subtle inasmuch as the reason presented is of avoiding temptation.

The third cause mentioned by St. John is closely connected with the second, being the fear which is engendered within the soul by these impure motions and ideas. Also in those of a tender and emotional temperament, any spiritual delight or, indeed, any disturbance of the soul, as by anger, grief or overmuch energy exercised in spiritual works, especially if this is motivated by regard of others, may give rise to such temptations. It must ever be remembered that any strain which affects one part of our nature will have an effect upon the whole. A common example of this is the irritability often experienced after Holy Communion, especially if it has been accompanied by sensible fervour, which is simply the effect of the spiritual tension through which the soul has passed. A great many of the troubles from which persevering souls suffer are due to over-eagerness and the endeavour to "key themselves up" as for some experience rather than quietly emptying themselves to receive God's gifts which their over-anxiety rather succeeds in dissipating than in assimilating. Especially with regard to the temptations here dealt with, every kind of disquiet, scruple or fear should be resisted, and the soul fix its gaze quietly and confidently upon God, so that it may walk securely in the midst of the fire as did the Three Children, praising Him who is their Helper and Deliverer.

The imperfections into which beginners fall with regard to the sin of anger show themselves in the sadness and irritability which they manifest when spiritual things cease to afford them the consolation they desire, or when for some reason they are deprived of such things. Others are always watching their neighbours with what they imagine is a holy zeal, fall into anger at their sins, and conceive it to be their duty to reprove them, which is seldom the case. Or they grow angry and impatient with their own faults and imperfections, wanting to be saints in a day, unmindful of the great need of patience in the spiritual life and of St. Jane Frances de Chantal's words, "The best practice of the virtue

of patience is the bearing with oneself in failure and feebleness of will." Such persons make great resolutions but accomplish few of them, for not being humble, the more they make the greater is their fall and their consequent anger with themselves, their *amour-propre* being hurt, and their impatience preventing them seeing that their falls are allowed by God to bring them to true humility. But, adds St. John, "some are so patient with regard to the progress desired, that God would wish them to see them much less so."

Of spiritual gluttony there is much to be said which is no less needed in the twentieth than in the sixteenth century. The seeking more after spiritual sweetness than spiritual purity and discretion: the running ahead beyond the limits of moderation within which the virtues are acquired by attempting more than the frailty of nature can bear in the way of exterior mortifications and religious exercises, and this without or contrary to direction. Those who act in this way "are most imperfect and without reason," for they exalt bodily penance above subjection of self and obedience, which is rational and discreet penance acceptable to God, whereas the other, by itself, is no more than the penance of animals, sought because of the pleasure it gives. Such persons are wont to pester their directors to allow them to do as they wish in this, and are peevish if they cannot have their own way. Others insist on being allowed frequent communion or go to communion without the consent of their confessor, and make careless confessions, "being more desirous to eat than to eat cleanly and perfectly." (This section iv of chap. vi must, of course, be read in the light of recent legislation upon daily communion.) They strive too eagerly to gain some sensible pleasure in receiving Holy Communion, so that if this is absent, they think that they have not received any good, "not understanding that the least of the good which is given in this Holy Sacrament is that which affects the senses; for the invisible grace which is given is so much greater that in order to cause them to look upon it with the eyes of faith, God often withholds these sensible tastes and consolations," the desire for which

"is a great imperfection and very contrary to the nature of God, for it is impurity in faith."

These spiritual gluttons behave in the same way with regard to prayer, thinking that it consists in sensible devotion, and so seek to gain this with great labour, wearying and fatiguing their faculties and heads; and being displeased when they fail. "Thus they lose true devotion and spirituality which consists in persevering with patience, humility, and distrust of self, that God alone may be pleased." All this comes from acting like children, following inclination and self-pleasing rather than reason, and is fatal to that spirit of self-denial by which perfection is attained.

The same reason gives rise to imperfections of envy and sloth, as when displeasure is experienced at seeing the progress of other souls or hearing them praised, or, with regard to sloth, the avoidance of things which are most spiritual, as when prayer is given up because it gives no sensible delight, or the way of perfection is abandoned because it demands the labour of obedience, as St. Benedict says, and of self-denial. Such persons would have God conform His will to theirs, and not infrequently delude themselves into thinking that God is pleased because they are satisfied.

The description of these imperfections "among the many" to be found in those who are in "this first state of beginners" shows how greatly is the need, not only of their own efforts aided by grace to overcome these childish ways of thinking and acting, but that God should lead them at the same time into the Passive Night of the Senses, "since however much the beginner exercises himself in the mortification of himself in all these actions and passions he cannot do all that is needed, and, indeed, very little, until God does it in him passively by means of the purgation of the said night," that is, the Saint explains in the following chapter, the passive side of the Night of Faith in which meditation gives place to Contemplation in its earliest form (*D.N.* I, vii, 5; viii, 1).

THE second reason for the need of the dark Night of Sense is concerned with the interior senses and the faculties of the intellect, memory and will, the treatment of which occupies the major part of books two and three of *The Ascent*. This need arises from the fact that whilst these senses and faculties are remote means of union with God, they are not proximate means, they are most valuable God-bestowed gifts upon our nature which are meant to be exercised to their utmost capacity as they exist in each human soul in order that we may draw near to God, learn of, worship, love and serve Him in this life, but they do not and cannot unite us to God. For all these senses and faculties have to do with that which is sensible and material, whilst "God is Spirit" as our Lord teaches, union with whom is only possible by the proximate means of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity.

We must, then, consider with St. John, what is meant by union with God, and the reasons in particular that the Saint gives for the need of the entire detachment of the interior senses and faculties of the soul from all their normal activity so far as concerns the attainment of such union as is possible in this life.

The Saint begins by disavowing any intention of treating the subject of man's union with God fully, but only of that which immediately concerns his purpose, which is the "total and permanent union according to the substance of the soul and its faculties in relation to the obscure habit of union; for as to the act, we shall speak later, by the Divine favour, as to how it is not possible for there to be a permanent union in the faculties in this life, but only a transitory one." The distinction between habit and act needs no explanation, but we may note that which he makes between the permanent character of the union of the soul itself with God, and the transitory

nature of that union as it affects the faculties by which the soul's activity is principally exercised. For he is referring here, as will be seen later, not to the union according to the natural order or to that accomplished by grace, but to that mystical union attained in the Spiritual Marriage. First, then, and as the foundation and reason of all that follows, "it must be understood that God dwells and is substantially present in every soul, even though it be that of the greatest sinner in the world" (A. II, v, 3). For "we live and move and have our being in God," so that if it were possible that God should cease to be, we and all things would relapse into that nothingness which God filled with creatures, and from which they are saved by His ever-creative act which preserves all things in being. St. John terms this union "substantial or essential," one which is according to the natural order of creation, and it is important that we should see that it is this essential union which is the foundation of that more perfect and realized union which comes about by grace which, as St. Thomas says, "constitutes a singular mode of God's presence in things" (S.T. I, VIII, iii, 4). It may be said that according to this essential, natural union God is actually present *in* the soul, but not present *to* the soul, that is, not as perceived or recognized by the soul. As John of St. Thomas says, God exists in all creatures as the hidden root and principle of all their being, nearer to them than even the form is to the accidents of their being, intimately penetrating, filling and giving all their being. But by the gift of grace the soul becomes capable of perceiving this presence of God within itself, a new relationship between God and the soul is established, so that "He who is the root and principle of our being begins to manifest Himself as an object to the created intellect, not as any object, but as one intimately within the soul as the root of its being. This manifestation, this familiarity, this relation necessarily involves a new mode of the presence of God, very different to that of His presence as the root of the being of the soul and as the principle infusing that being. It is a Person who lives with and manifests Himself as an object to the soul . . . exciting within

it, by this familiarity, an experience of Himself by knowledge and love " (*Cursus Theol.* 1A, xliii, 17, 3).

This second state of union by grace St. John but refers to as well known, passing to that more perfect one, to which grace enables the soul, and which he calls supernatural, using the term here, not in the common sense, but as designating that "union of likeness" which is accomplished "when the two wills, that is to say, that of God and that of the soul, are conformed in one, there being nothing in the one which is repugnant to the other. Thus when the soul detaches itself entirely from all that which is repugnant to and not conformed with the will of God, it is transformed in God by love" (A. II, v, 3). And this must be not only as regards acts but habits of imperfections which must be totally annihilated, for only when there is nothing in the soul which is contrary to God can it "receive the likeness of God." But without grace this is impossible, since it is not effected by the natural presence of God in the soul but only by His raising it to a supernatural state, which is by His communication "of love and grace, which all do not possess; and those who do, do not all in the same degree; for some have reached higher degrees of love than others, and God communicates Himself most to that soul that has most advanced in love; that is, whose will is most conformed to the will of God."

The soul may be compared to a window upon which a ray of the sun is falling. If the window is stained or dust-engrined the light will only "illumine and transform it into its own light" according to its state or degree of cleanliness, and this owing, not to the sun's ray, but to the state of the window. So, if it be pure and clean the ray will penetrate, illumine and transform it so that it will seem to be the very ray of sunlight itself. For (note how St. John avoids any charge of pantheism), although the window is not the ray, being of another nature, it may be called a ray or light by participation. Now, "the soul is like this window upon which is ever beating, or better, in which is ever dwelling, this Divine light of the being of God by nature as we have

said." Here something must be added to St. John who passes at once to the work of God in the mystic state. Grace, as has been said, awakens the soul to the perception of the natural presence of God, and also reveals the impurities of sin which have gathered upon this window of the soul, so that these have to be removed before the process "of getting rid of every mist and stain of creatures," the labour of love in detaching itself from everything which is not God, can begin, and when completed in the Dark Night of the Spirit, fits the soul for "illumination and transformation in God, who communicates to it His supernatural Being in such manner that it appears to be God Himself, and possesses that which God Himself possesses . . . although it is true that its natural being, even so transformed, is as distinct from the Being of God as it was before" (A. II, v, 6-7).

This union is not accomplished in all in the same degree, for this depends on the capacity of each soul and upon our Lord's will for each. All see God in heaven, some more perfectly, some less so, but all are content since each sees up to its capacity and is satisfied. So also is it on earth; but no one must set limits of his own to his capacity, for "the soul that does not attain to the purity which is possible to its capacity, will never arrive at true peace and satisfaction" (*ibid.* ii). Such a union as the Saint describes only becomes possible when the soul is not only detached from creatures, but from everything which it can acquire by the use of the interior senses and faculties. It must be "not only in darkness according to that part which has relation to creatures and temporal things, which is the sensitive, lower part, but also it must be blind and in darkness according to the part which has to do with God and spiritual things, which is the rational higher part of the soul" (A. II, iv, 2). And here St. John uses the term "supernatural" in its ordinary sense, as that which is above nature, which being both sensitive and rational, must be transcended as a whole. This teaching is founded in the fact that union with God cannot be attained by any exercise of the interior senses or faculties since nothing in creatures comes near to God or

has any resemblance to Him. For, as St. Thomas says, although creatures are like God, He is not like creatures but is at an infinite distance from and altogether other than creatures. So "all that the imagination can imagine and the intellect receive and understand in this life is not, and cannot be a proximate means of union with God" (4. II, viii, 4). For all that the imagination forms in the way of images, pictures and notions is derived from things received through the bodily senses and in the formation of those pictures is dependent upon material things, so that the pictures it presents to the intellect are always clothed in material form, and are but the merest hint of what God is, who is Spirit.

In this life, wherein the soul gains all its knowledge through the senses, the intellect has "no preparation or capacity for receiving the clear knowledge of God" save in so far as it may be raised above its natural capacity and activity. No imagining or thinking unites the soul to God though both activities are remote means of coming to Him. But as the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* says, God "may well be loved, but not thought, by love may He be gotten and holden, but by thought never." And "natural wit, be it never so subtle and holy, may be called . . . but feigned folly formed in phantasy, and far from the very certainty when the ghostly sun shineth, as the darkness of the moon-shine in a mist at mid-winter night from the brightness of the sun in the clearest time of mid-summer day."

Hence the necessity for the dark Night of the Senses, now to be understood as referring to the interior senses and faculties, in which faith obscures and renders the rational part of the soul incapable of exercising its natural activity. This must not be understood to mean that faith destroys the natural faculties, on the contrary it perfects them by enabling a much higher exercise than that which is possible to the intellect and will alone. That this may be clear we must consider closely the distinction between the highest activity of which the intellect is capable, which is an act of intuition, and that lower activity, more common in this life,

which is that of reason. Modern writers frequently confound the term "intellect" with that of "reason," as if the two were synonymous, thus giving rise to much of the confusion which prevails in present-day thought. For so the intellect is reduced to its lowest act, that which St. Thomas calls "a defect of the intellect" which is the act of reasoning. Thus, as with M. Bergson and others, the intellect is attacked as if this "defect" of reasoning were its sole act, whilst intuition which is its supreme act is treated as something above and apart from it. But, as St. Thomas teaches, intellect and reason are not two different faculties, but the latter is an imperfection of the intellect due to its present condition. The term intellect or intelligence reveals the nature of the faculty, *inter legeré*, to read within, so that intellect "means an intimate penetration of truth, reason the searching after truth" (S.T. 11A, 11æ, xlv, 10, 2).

Man is the lowest of rational creatures, above him are the angels who by their nature, that of pure spirits, possess a direct intellectual knowledge of what is known by them, that is, they do not arrive at truth by a process of reasoning but by a direct intuition or open contemplation of truth. "Therefore they are called intellectual beings; because even with ourselves the things which are instantly grasped by the mind are said to be understood (*intelligi*). . . . But human souls which acquire knowledge of truth by the discursive method are called *rational*; and this comes of the feebleness of their intellectual light" (S.T. I, lviii, 11). "Knowledge gained by the method of reasoning is due to the imperfection of the intellectual nature (of man), because that which is known by means of another thing is less known than if it were grasped directly by itself" (*Contra Gentiles*, I, lvii).

Hence, also, arises the modern error that the mind is incapable of attaining to anything beyond its own ideas, whereas to St. Thomas and St. John the unique characteristic of the mind lies in its capacity to attain reality in all its forms, even to the Supreme Reality, God Himself. St. John is not concerned to demonstrate that the mind is capable of the idea of God, a phrase so common to-day, but, on the

contrary, that all ideas, images and notions are to be forsaken in order that the mind, by its supreme, intuitive act, may attain to its adequate object God Himself, in the highest degree possible to it in this life. He envisages the intellect as capable of an ever-widening activity, from its elementary act of apprehending that which the senses reveal to it, through its operations of imagining, formation of ideas, reasoning, etc., on to that which it was created for, the seeing of God, here illumined by faith and the gifts of the Spirit, hereafter in the *lumen gloriæ* of the Beatific Vision.

Although, then, reasoning is the most common activity of the intellect in man, it is not the highest one possible to him, which is intuition. It is in this sense that St. Thomas uses the term Contemplation as of an intuitive grasp of the truth which it is clear that he regards as the adequate object of the intellect. For "the last end of man is the contemplation of truth. This alone is distinctive of his nature, and no other being (of earth) shares it with him. Nor is there any object beyond it, for the contemplation of truth is an end in itself. Hereby man is united in likeness with superior spirits, because this alone of human activities is also an activity of God and the angels. Also, by this activity man comes into contact with those higher beings . . . and in it is more self-sufficient, as in this he stands in little need of the aid of external things" (*Contra Gentiles*, III, xxxvii).

In this passage St. Thomas clearly regards the intellect as capable of a higher activity than that of discursive reasoning, which does not exist in God or the angels, but is a consequence of man's lowly position in the hierarchy of created spirits, so that he is more commonly defined as a "rational" animal than as intellectual, since he more usually arrives at truth by a process of reasoning than by an intellectual intuition.

Now, it is this fact which determines and dominates St. John's teaching in the second book of *The Ascent*, in which he describes the necessary activity on the part of the soul itself in corresponding with the operation of God who,

by the gift of Contemplation, substitutes a purely spiritual, intellectual operation for the lower one of discursive reasoning which, with regard to God and spiritual realities, it now makes impossible. But this is not to destroy but to elevate the intellect to its highest place and work by freeing it from the limitations imposed by its immersion in time and space. He is concerned to show how the intellect may arrive at "the intuition of naked truth" (*The Ascent*, c. xxvi, heading *en que se trata de las inteligencias de verdades desnudas en el entendimiento*. Here, like St. Thomas, he uses the term "intellectus" as opposed to "ratio," reason). This, he says, can only be done by such an annihilation of the ordinary exercise of the imagination, intellect, memory and will as will liberate the soul, that by means of the intellect and will, whose highest acts are to know and to love God, it may come into union with God. He repeatedly begs his readers to remember both to whom and for what purpose he is writing. It is for "the spiritual man," "the discreet reader," he whom God would lead into the Night of Faith and of dark Contemplation, not for those beginners, in the ordinary sense of the term, "whom it is necessary to prepare by these discursive apprehensions" of meditation, which are but a remote means to union with God, the A.B.C. of true spirituality.

He is well aware that unless this is recognized, it "will appear as if we were destroying the path of spiritual practice rather than building it up," that "some one will say, this is all very well, but it leads to the destruction of the natural use and activity of the faculties, making man as a mere animal, in a state of oblivion and even worse, since he can no longer reason or remember his natural necessities and operations." To this the Saint answers that the faculties are not suppressed but enabled to operate at their highest, to pass beyond their natural limitations to a supernatural freedom of activity, becoming in union with God more Divine than human, for as St. Paul teaches, he that is joined to God is one spirit with Him. Thus the more that souls, under the influence of the Gifts of the Spirit, cease their natural, human manner of

thinking, reasoning, remembering and willing, so much the more "the Spirit of God teaches them that which they know, and to be ignorant of that which it is good for them not to know, and to remember what they have to remember, with or without (mental) images, and to forget that which should be forgotten; and makes them love that which they ought to love, and not to love that which is not in God" (A. III, ii, 1, 7-9).

This will demand further consideration when we come to speak of the effects of the gift of Contemplation, here we would simply emphasize that the possibility of such a gift, so far as man is concerned, rests upon the capacity of the intellect, not merely to think and reason, but "to see" by a direct intuition, an act which, as St. John says, "is not performed by the "active" intellect, as the philosophers call it, which works by means of forms and phantasies and apprehensions of things; but by the intellect inasmuch as it is "possible" and "passible," not receiving such forms, etc., but passively receiving substantial knowledge, which is given to it without any active functioning or work of its own" (S.C. (first edition), xxxviii, 9).

It is also of importance to note that St. John is primarily dealing with the prayer-life of the soul which as it develops in the Night of Sense exerts a growing influence upon the whole of human activity. All that he has to say concerning this Night both on its active and passive side is consequent upon the passage of the soul from meditation to contemplation and the deepening of this new state of prayer. Necessarily this will flow out into and affect the whole of the soul's activity, exterior as interior, but the Saint treats the latter incidentally, his mind is set upon what goes on within.

All spiritual guides insist that mortification and prayer must go together, and St. John now proceeds to show how that the former means much more than mortification of the passions. With St. Paul he would have us see that it is such a "dying to self," to the natural man which cannot receive the things of the spirit as involves the highest faculties

of our being. If we are to become "new creatures" there must be "a putting off of the old man," a growing out of our natural ways of thinking, willing and acting that we may "grow up into Christ in all things . . . unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. iv, 13-15). No better commentary upon the Pauline doctrine of the spiritual life could be found than in St. John's writings.

The second book of *The Ascent* treats, then, of "the proximate means of ascending to union with God, which is faith" (title heading, chap. i), and describes the second part of the Night of Sense on its active side "which consists of what the soul can do for itself" (*A. I*, xiii, 1). The manner of entering into this Night is dealt with in chap. xiii of the previous book (*vide* chap ix, p. 196). This Night, says St. John, "belongs to the spirit," that is, to the spiritual senses, and should not be confused with the Night of the Spirit which is treated in the second book of *The Dark Night*. As St. John's doctrine of the nature of faith and its function in the spiritual life goes far beyond the common conception which confines itself to the elementary character of this first of the theological virtues, it will be necessary to consider his teaching in relation to the whole meaning of faith. Faith is first of all a virtue bestowed with the gift of sanctifying grace in Baptism, enlightening the intellect and enabling it to believe in God and to receive the revelation made by Him simply and solely upon His word. It confers upon the eye of the mind the power of seeing beyond the visible and material, as says the Apostle, that by faith Moses "endured as seeing Him who is invisible." It is "a habit of the soul, certain and obscure. And the reason for its being an obscure habit is that it enables us to believe truths revealed by God Himself, which are above all natural light, and exceed all human understanding . . . which by itself extends only to natural knowledge, although it has a potentiality for the supernatural when our Lord is pleased to bestow a supernatural activity upon it. . . . Faith tells us of things which we have never seen or understood in themselves, or in any

likeness to them, since they bear no resemblance to anything that we know. Thus we have no light of natural knowledge concerning them, for what we are told of them bears no proportion to anything of the senses ; we know it by hearing alone, believing that which we are taught, subjecting and blinding our natural light (to that of faith). For, as St. Paul says, *Fides ex auditu*, as if he were to say, " Faith is not knowledge which enters by any sense, but is solely the consent of the soul to that which enters through the hearing " (A. II, iii.)

Faith, then, must be seen, not as a contradiction or inhibition of the intellect but a perfecting, " the intellect is perfected in the darkness of faith " (A. II, vi, 1), extending its Vision, withdrawing, as says St. Thomas, " the mind from the realm of sense and setting it upon the foundation of intelligible things," " for a firm faith gives persistence and stability to the apprehension " (*De Potentia*, II, vi, 9), or, in the *Tantum ergo*, referring to the Presence of our Lord in the Most Holy Sacrament,

Faith alone, our sense transcending
Shows true hearts the mystery,

i.e. the hidden reality of the Sacrament, known only by faith in our Lord's word.

But faith is more than belief in the existence of that which cannot be reached by the senses, for as belief merely, St. James tells us, " The devils also believe and tremble." True faith not only causes us to believe in but brings us into contact with Divine and supernatural things, " draws Divine things toward us," and causes them " to abide in us " (*De Potentia, supra*). An illustration of this is to be found in our Lord's words, " Thy faith hath saved thee," spoken to those who so believed in Him that they drew near and touched Him, this touch of faith being the cause of their healing. Such is the faith of those who approach and touch Him in the sacraments of His Mystical Body which are the chief means by which the grace and merits of the Passion are conveyed to the soul. But we must note that neither

St. Thomas nor St. John confine the activity of faith to the reception of the Sacraments and the use of the other means of grace, since all these are in one way or another linked up with the sensible and material, have something of sight and touch about them, whilst St. Paul says that "we walk by faith, not by sight," in which faith is seen as sharply opposed to sight, that is, to all that is perceivable or may be reached by anything of the senses. So St. Thomas teaches that there are two ways by which we are united to the Passion. *Virtus passionis Christi copulatur nobis per fidem, et sacramenta : differenter tamen ; nam continuatio, quæ est per fidem, fit per actum animæ : continuatio autem, quæ est per sacramenta, fit per usum exteriorum rerum.* "The virtue of the passion of Christ is joined to us by faith, and sacraments : but in different ways ; for that which is by faith is an act of the soul, while that by sacraments is by the use of external things" (S.T. III, LXII, vi). Now, St. John's whole task is to deal with the psychological side of the act of faith which is the more perfect as it is independent, not only of external things but of any interior mediums such as those formed by the natural activity of the interior senses and faculties. This does not imply any neglect or depreciation of the sacraments and rites of the Church, but rather a more perfect understanding and use of them, for St. John is not dealing with this aspect of Christian practice, but assuming it, is treating of the soul's intimate, personal relationship with God which is lived, expressed and grows in its prayer. For, as he repeats, this second half of the Night of Sense begins when God draws souls "from the state of beginners, which is that of those who meditate in the spiritual road, and begins to place them in that of proficients, which is that of those who are already contemplatives" (D.N. I, i, 1).

That which he calls "pure faith" is that virtue as it "works by charity," and is brought to perfection by the gifts of Understanding and Wisdom, the consideration of the nature and operation of which must be reserved to the chapter upon Contemplation. St. John has already spoken of the darkness in which the Nights through which the soul

journeys to God is enveloped (*A. I, II, iii*). He now goes on to explain how it is that faith, which is as a new, Divine light shed upon the intellect enabling it to see the supernatural realities of the eternal order, is yet a darkness even greater and deeper than that experienced in the first part of the Night of Sense. To understand this apparent contradiction we must see faith as a growing virtue, the power and light of which gradually becomes intensified as the soul moves toward God. At first, faith confers a new clarity of sight in which Divine things are seen with a certain distinctness and certitude through the instrumentality of the dogmas of the Church, the externals of sacraments and the ideas, pictures and forms constructed in the imagination and memory. Thus, as St. Augustine says, faith leads to understanding, to a growing acquisition of knowledge, desire and love, and this especially by the practice of Meditation, by which the truths of the Faith are assimilated so that that which is so known is in him who knows according to his manner and degree of knowing, or as St. John says, the truths of the faith are "outlined" in the soul, yet not perfectly filled in, "for even as the outline is not a perfect painting, so the knowledge of faith is not perfect knowledge" (*S.C. xi, 5*). Yet an outline has a distinctness, which to some degree is lost in the finished picture, and in the early stages of the life of faith this outlined character results from the fact that the things of the Divine Order are visualized under images, ideas and terms which are derived from things of the natural order and so are inadequate to present Divine truths of the spiritual order as they are in themselves. Such visualization varies according to the intellectual and imaginative capacity of each individual with the consequence that the higher this is the more spiritual and abstract will be the ideas under which the truths of the faith are conceived. A child or a peasant will find no difficulty in conceiving of God as a venerable and benign Sovereign seated upon His throne whilst the theologian or mature Christian finds a difficulty in conceiving God under any notion derived from material things. Thus the progress of faith is not from less

to more clearness but the opposite since, as St. John constantly repeats, no creature, idea, or image bears any resemblance to God who is Spirit. But this growing obscurity, which is the experience of all faithful souls in some degree or another, and which when not understood, leads to much heart-searching and even error, is due, not to a diminution of the light of faith, but to its intensification. The early, outline clearness becomes more and more swallowed up by the light which, as it beats upon the interior senses and faculties, blinds their natural sight and impedes their activity. Thus the second stage in the Night of the Senses is darker than the first, as midnight is to twilight, for the first stage "pertains to the lower part of man, which is the sensitive part, and, in consequence, the most exterior; and this second stage of faith pertains to the higher part of man, which is the rational part and, in consequence, is more interior and obscure, because it deprives it of the light of reason, or, it may be better said, blinds it" (*A. II, ii, 2*). And this, not as destroying the natural faculties but as elevating them to the fullest exercise possible to them. It is as when a man accustomed to live and work in darkened surroundings emerges into the blinding sunshine of a summer's day and at first can see nothing owing to the excess of light in which he stands. So St. John says, "this excessive light of faith which is given to the soul is obscure darkness, for it deprives it of that which is most and overwhelms that which is least, even as the light of the sun reduces all other lights whatsoever so that when it shines and overwhelms our visual powers they seem not to be lights at all. . . . So, the light of faith, by its excessive greatness, oppresses and renders useless that of the intellect, which of itself alone extends only to natural knowledge, although it has an (obediential or passive) faculty for the supernatural" (*A. II, iii, 1*: for obediential faculty, see p. 133). Yet it is precisely this obscurity of pure faith which gives the truest light to the soul, for this faith was foreshadowed by the cloud which hid the children of Israel from the Egyptians when they were about to enter the Red Sea, of which it is said, "It was a dark cloud giving light

by night"—*Erat nubes tenebrosa, et illuminans noctem* (Ex. xiv, 20). So "as the presence of faith deprives the soul of its natural light and blinds it, with its darkness it gives light and illumination to the darkness of the soul," . . . that as David teaches us, saying, "*Et nox illuminatio mea in deliciis meis*, which is to say: The night will be light to me in my delights" (A. II, iii, 4-6).

The soul must become as a blind man, relying solely upon the guidance of faith, and not trusting or leaning upon any knowledge of its own or any feeling or experience of God, for none of this is like God or unites the soul to Him. This is St. Paul's meaning in saying: *Accedentem ad Deum oportet credere quod est*. That is, to come to God the soul must walk by faith alone, since the Being of God is not perceivable or to be attained by anything of the senses; "in this life the highest thing that can be felt and experienced is infinitely distant from God and from the pure possession of Him. Isaiah and St. Paul say: *Nec oculus vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis ascendit, quae praeeparavit Deus iis, qui diligunt illum*. That is, that which God hath prepared for them that love Him neither eye hath seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart or thought of man. However much, then, the soul seeks to be perfectly united by grace in this life with that to which it will be united by glory in the life to come . . . it is clear that in order to come perfectly to union with God in this life by grace and love, the soul must be in darkness with regard to everything that enters through the eye, and to all that can be received by the ear, and which can be imagined with the phantasy, and comprehended in the heart, which here means the soul," which "must pass beyond all to unknowing . . . leaving its own road to pass on to the end and to enter into that which has no way, which is God" (A. II, iv).

But let it be remembered, lest all this should tend to discouragement or to such errors as Mr. Paul Elmer More has fallen into in his criticism of the Saint's teaching (*Christian Mysticism*, S.P.C.K., 1932), that this Dark Night of Faith is not only a light but a way to fullest light since it

leads to God in whom "is no darkness at all." For "when these three parts of the night have come to an end God begins to illuminate the soul supernaturally with the rays of His Divine light" (*A.* II, ii, 1), and, "by being blinded in its faculties upon this way, the soul will see light, according to the saying of the Saviour in the Gospel, I am come into this world for judgment; that they which see not may see, and that they which see may become blind" (*ibid.* II, iv, 7), and "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life," which, like His gift of peace, is "not as the world giveth."

The value of this teaching can hardly be exaggerated, for to-day, as in St. John's time, many souls, both in the world and in religion, stumble and fall and not infrequently go back from lack of the knowledge of it. Beginning well and making progress in the early stages of the spiritual life, they become so accustomed to the manner of walking therein that they come to think that all that is needed is to persevere in and perfect that manner. Thus they grow up to a certain point by the use of the ordinary means of grace and the practice of the Christian virtues, finding in all these much comfort and consolation, which tends to cause them to rest in and upon these exterior means and the sensible emotions they evoke. But there is a limit to all this, the way of the spiritual life does not, as it were, continue in a straight line, but begins to curve away and upward into a darkness in which all that so far has been of so much help and so full of sensible consolation now begins to appear as empty and useless. Especially is this true with regard to prayer and meditation which becomes increasingly difficult, if not well nigh impossible, and seems to yield no fruit. Instead of the mysteries of the Faith becoming clearer and more evident, they seem to recede into the distance, the former considerations and pictures lose their meaning and power, and in place of that joy and renewal of strength once experienced in prayer, there is now only helplessness, dryness and an incapacity to do anything at the time of prayer. Mass, the Sacraments and various devotions all suffer a similar

“sea-change,” and the disquieted soul falls into anxiety and endless self-examination, endeavouring to find the cause of this within itself. Fearful of going back it throws itself all the more violently into its former practices, in the hope of reviving the life it appears to be losing. But in vain, for the cause lies not in itself but in God who is leading it onward, away from its old manner of approaching and receiving Him, or better, away from approaching and receiving His gifts, to Himself who is alone its “exceeding great reward.” “For our Lord continues to prove the soul and raise it in such manner that at first He gives it things which are very low and exterior according to sense, suitable to its lowly capacity ; to the end that, acting as it ought and receiving these first morsels with moderation for its strength and sustenance, He may raise it to the receiving of more and better food ” (A. II, xi, 9), and it is for this reason that what has been so far given, as necessary and suitable for its immature, childish state, is now withdrawn, so that the spiritual hunger and thirst of the soul may not be dissipated upon the sweetmeats beloved by children but may be nourished with the more spiritual food of the adult sons of God. Thus the need of the soul’s activity in co-operating with that which God wills for it, and, as it has already detached itself from its passions and the desire and affection for worldly things, now that detachment must be extended to the desire and affection for all that can be known, imagined or experienced by the use of the intellect, imagination, memory and will.

Nor would this sound so extraordinary and new had we grasped the meaning of the terms “spiritual” and “faith,” and the Apostolic teaching upon the need of our growing up in the spiritual life and of going on—not as far as it pleases us—but to perfection, to that “holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” For the essential meaning of “spirit” is that which in itself has nothing of the senses although the spirit may be and is communicated through and acts by the senses, yet it is altogether independent of and other than the sensible ; and of “faith” that it is only

truly faith when it rests and depends upon nothing but God Himself. Thus that which is necessary in the state of spiritual childhood becomes a hindrance to progress toward maturity. "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Cor. xiii, 11), and by putting them away become that upon which God can bestow the high gifts of His Spirit, bringing the soul which allows itself to be led into the Dark Night "into a new kind of knowledge and deepest delight, all other old images and forms of knowledge being cast away, and all that is of the old man, which is the habitude of the natural being, having ceased, and the soul being invested with a new supernatural habitude according to all its faculties" (A. I, v, 7).

So far the Saint has confined himself to the subject of faith, now in chap. vi he explains the rôle of the three theological virtues in relation to the chief faculties of the soul, the intellect, memory and will, of which faith, hope and charity are "the proper supernatural objects, and by means of which the soul is united to God according to its faculties." For "the intellect must be perfected in the darkness of faith; and the memory in the emptiness of hope; and . . . the will buried in the detachment from all affection that it may go to God" in love for Him alone. For faith tells us of that which it is beyond the power of the natural intellect to receive or understand; hope directs the memory from what is stored up within it to that which it does not possess: and charity causes us to love God above all things, withdrawing the will from all else but Him. The full explication of this and the active means to be adopted by the soul in order to second the work of God in delivering it from all that would hinder its journey towards Him occupies the rest of *The Ascent*.

The important place which St. John gives to the theological virtues may arouse surprise in the minds of those who have grown used to the *materialization* of Christianity which has been in process since the sixteenth century, one consequence of which has been the losing sight of the primary

and fundamental nature and function of these virtues, together with the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost which perfect the operation of the virtues. Up to the sixteenth century they occupy a foremost place in all spiritual teaching ; with an unanimous voice the masters of the spiritual life proclaim their necessity, and demonstrate how that all the practices of religion are designed to that increase of faith, hope and charity for which the Church prays in the Collect for the thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost. But for the last four hundred years the Christian mind has been more and more directed to the practices themselves than to the end for which they are performed, and, in addition, practices of one kind and another have been multiplied to such an extent that too often an increase in the soul's application to and use of them has been mistaken for spiritual progress, with the result that those who fall into this error, instead of growing in the virtues, become stunted, narrow and unspiritual, and a hindrance to those who are outside the Church. It is one of the greatest merits of St. John's teaching that it reveals the destructive character of this so-called "devotion," and without condemning or even speaking lightly of any means sanctioned by the Church in her desire to provide for the needs of all her children, he upholds the supremacy of the theological virtues to the growth of which all Christian practice should be aimed, and exposes the poverty of the soul which does not see the uselessness of any practice which is not aiding it toward that union with God Himself which may be attained by faith, hope and charity alone.

In this connection, too, his teaching is directly opposed to all that "religiosity" and sentimentality which has invaded modern religion, reducing it to an emotional experience which is imagined to be a sign of the soul's contact with God, but is usually, if not always, nothing more than a stirring of the senses due to physical causes which, not infrequently, the devil seizes upon to delude the soul. So faith is reduced to feeling, hope to a mere desire for present satisfaction, charity to an affection of the passions instead of a choice of the will, religion as a whole degraded from its high estate

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as the means by which the soul is bound to God to a sanction to right conduct, an accessory to the ordering of life and to personal self-satisfaction. The test of its truth and value is the "good" it affords to him who practises it, "good" meaning some sensible satisfaction, or even to some, an increase in worldly goods.

“THE state and exercise of beginners is that of meditation by the use of discursive reasoning and acts formed in the imagination, in which the soul needs to be given matter upon which to reflect and reason, and in which also it is well that it should make interior acts, and even in spiritual things avail itself of the aid of sensible consolation and fervour, for so the desire, profiting by its delight in the things of the spirit, grows in detachment from the things of sense and of the world. But when this is effected to some degree, and the desire has attained a habit in spiritual things and gained some measure of strength and stability, then God begins to wean the soul, as it is said, and lead it into the state of contemplation, which, with some souls, especially religious, happens very soon, since these, having renounced the world, the more rapidly conform their sense and desire according to God, and their exercises become spiritual since it is God who acts within them. This transition (from meditation to contemplation) takes place when the discursive acts and meditation fail, and the first fervours and consolations cease with them, so that the soul is unable to meditate as once it did, nor finds any aid in the senses which are now in aridity, all their good being transferred to the spirit, the senses no longer having capacity for it. And as all the operations of which the soul is capable by itself are dependent solely upon the senses, it follows that God is the agent in this state and the soul is the recipient : for the soul acts only by receiving, and as one in whom these things are being done by God ; and God as one who works these things in the soul, bestowing spiritual blessings upon it in contemplation, which is Divine knowledge and love in one, a loving knowledge; in which the soul no longer needs to exercise its natural acts and meditations, since it cannot profit by them as before ” (*L.F.* iii, 32 ; Second Redaction).

St. John makes the whole of the prayer life consist of

two main activities, meditation and contemplation, each of which has its own degrees of progress and intensity, although it is with those of the latter with which he is most concerned. The passage from one to the other is one of the most serious import in the spiritual life, and as may be seen from the Prologue to *The Ascent* and in the Saint's repeated references to it all through his works, occupies a central place in his teaching. The crisis is common to all souls who are persevering in Christian practice, and ignorance of its nature or of how to act when it comes about is largely responsible for the fact that so many souls who have made progress sooner or later come to a halt, and either settle down into mediocrity, remain in a troubled and disturbed state, or fall away altogether. The cause of this crisis lies in the fact that the first stage of the spiritual life, which consists of the conquest of the passions, the formation of good habits, the walking in the ordinary way of Christian practice, is but the first stage, the preparatory school of the spiritual life, in which the dominating characteristic is a great activity of the soul responding to and co-operating with Divine grace. Meditation upon the mysteries of the Faith serves to habituate the soul in the knowledge and love for Divine things which become clearer, more distinct to it as the realities of the things of God are conceived under the forms of ideas, pictures and notions created by the active use of the reasoning, imaginative and memorative faculties. With all this elementary practice there is usually a great deal of sensible fervour, a delight in the use of the things of religion, in hearing Mass, receiving the sacraments, in prayer and other exercises, and which the soul thinks will go on increasing and deepening, as also that the practice of meditation will grow into a more and more clear light and distinct knowledge of the things of God. One has only to progress on the same path and all that which has been gradually growing in light and intensity will develop during the rest of one's life. But sooner or later, to the surprise and consternation of the soul, the very opposite happens, that which was imagined to be an open road apparently ends in a *cul-de-sac*, the light fades into

darkness, the delight gives place to uncertainty, aridity and torment. The things of religion lose their charm, meditation becomes impossible, prayer difficult, mortification distasteful, neither within nor without, in God or in creatures, can any comfort be found. The first impulse of the soul is to look for the cause of all this within itself, and, indeed, it might be found there, either in some neglect, some failure in detachment from creatures, or in some bodily condition, since soul and body being so intimately united, that which affects one will influence the other, so that it is not infrequently true that what people regard as "spiritual" troubles are really no more than disturbances of the physical nature. On the other hand, the most sincere and searching examination may fail to discover any definite thing to which this new state can be ascribed; so far as the soul is concerned, it has just happened, apparently without rhyme or reason. There may then follow the temptation to ask whether the cause does not lie in religion itself, whether the whole thing is not a delusion, since now all the good and virtue of it has apparently disappeared. What, indeed, is the good of going on when one no longer perceives or receives any "good" in the things of religion, when Mass and Sacraments apparently yield no fruit, and prayer has become almost impossible?

It was the genius of St. John to perceive both the commonness and danger of this state, to show what were the causes of it, by what signs it could be recognized as the act of God and what should be the behaviour of the soul whom God brings into this state. For this is God's work designed to lead the soul out of its elementary, childish state into the Night of Faith in which it may grow in spirituality toward union with Himself. For good and necessary as that elementary state is, it has dangers into which the soul is only too ready to fall. These are, briefly, first, the danger of mistaking the things of religion for the end for which they exist, i.e. union with God; the tendency to rest in the exterior and visible, to mistake or confound the channel for that which it conveys, the envelope of dogmas and sacraments with the reality which they symbolize, and of which

they are the channel. Even greater is the danger of mistaking the ideas, mental images and pictures formed in meditation for the original, and to imagine that the clearer and more distinct these are, the more they are like God, and are consequences of the soul's having drawn nearer to Him. And this is aided by the sensible devotion excited by such "picturings" of God, either interior or exterior, which tends to cause the soul to cling to the picture, the "idea" of God formed by the reason and imagination, rather than to press on to God Himself who is totally unlike any idea we can form of Him, none of which ideas can be the proximate means of union with Him. Moreover, this sensible devotion, which is a stirring of the lower part of the soul, is often mistaken for an experience of God Himself, whereas such experience—as of a contact with God—can only take place in the highest part of the soul, "the fine point of the spirit" as St. François de Sales terms it.

Mistaking these remote means for the proximate ones of faith, hope and charity, beginners fall into many sins and imperfections, such as St. John describes in the first book of *The Dark Night*, and from which they can only be delivered by being brought into the Night of Faith in which, being purified from their low and childish ways and desires, they may be led on to union with God. Thus God brings them into the state which has been described of obscurity and aridity, leading them from meditation to contemplation, since the former has done its work and further progress can only be made in the way of contemplation. The Saint proceeds to give and describe certain signs by which the soul may know when it ought to give up trying to practise meditation by use of its reasoning and imaginative powers, "in order that he may lay them aside neither sooner nor later than the Spirit bids him," since it is essential that the soul should neither run ahead of nor lag behind that guidance and drawing of God which it now becomes most necessary to yield to.

Before considering these three signs given by the Saint we must refer to the fact dealt with in chap. viii that the active and passive states do not simply succeed one to another, the

former being left entirely before the latter is entered upon, but that the passive state is one in which the activity of the operation of God gradually coincides with the activity of the soul, so purifying and illuminating it, more and more taking possession of it, that the operations of its lower part are, in St. John's words, "quieted and put to sleep," whilst the higher part is raised to its fullest exercise as it becomes more surrendered to and "filled with all the fulness of God." Thus the soul becomes more and more spiritualized, its will being more conformed to the Divine will, its activity being gathered up in one act of total surrender to that which God desires and works in it, until, in St. John's words, "it is transformed in God," and "all the desires of the soul, with its faculties and operations . . . are changed into Divine operations. . . . So the understanding of the soul is now the understanding of God ; and its will is the will of God ; and its memory is the memory of God ; and its delight is the delight of God ; and the substance of the soul, although it is not the substance of God, for into this it cannot be changed, is yet so united and absorbed in Him, and is thus God by participation in God, which comes to pass in this perfect state of the spiritual life, although not so perfectly as in the life to come " (*L.F.* ii, 29, 30).

Now in the ninth chapter of the first book of *The Dark Night*, which is concerned with the Night of Sense, St. John gives three signs which are sometimes confounded with those given in *The Ascent*, and sometimes treated as entirely different from them and held to refer to another stage of the soul's progress. But the truth seems to be that both refer to the same moment, although each group is concerned with a different aspect of that moment, those in *The Ascent* being, as the Saints says, "signs which the spiritual person will find in himself by which he may know *at what time* he ought to leave meditation and reasoning and to pass to the state of contemplation," whilst those in *The Dark Night* are "signs by which the spiritual person will know that he is walking by the way of this night and purgation of sense." The former, that is, show when meditation is to be given up,

the latter, how the aridity common to this state may be distinguished from that which might arise "from sins or imperfections, or from weakness and lukewarmness, or from some evil humour or indisposition of the body" (*D.N.* I, ix, 1). Or, to put it in another way, the signs in *The Ascent* concern the soul's activity, those in *The Dark Night*, its passive acceptance of the operation of God when it is He who produces this aridity in the soul. For, as we shall see, the chief work of the soul at this point in the spiritual life is to renounce its former manner of progress and to submit itself to the way in which God now wills to lead it, which involves not only the giving up of its own activity in meditation, but the receiving of the gift of contemplation by which God effects in the soul that which it cannot do by itself even aided by grace, for "however much the soul strives to aid itself, it cannot actively purify itself in such a manner as to be in the least disposed for the Divine union of the perfection of love, if God does not take its hand and purge it in that dark fire in such manner as we have to describe" (*D.N.* I, iii, 3).

In chaps. viii and xii of the second book of *The Ascent* St. John gives the reason why, at the time indicated by the signs given in chap. xiii, the practice of meditation must, at least as a regular thing, be abandoned. This is that meditation is the work of the intellect there engaged, not in its highest act which is one of direct intuition or contemplation, but in that of reasoning, which is "a defect of the intellect" caused by its union with the body and the necessity it lies under of ordinarily gaining all its knowledge through the senses. Now "no thing, either created or imagined, can serve the intellect as a proper means of uniting it to God" for, "according to a rule of philosophy, all means must bear a proportion to the end, that is to say, they must have some connection and likeness to the end, such as is enough and sufficient to enable the attainment of that end by them. For example, a man who wishes to arrive at a city must of necessity go by the road, which is the means of bringing him there and unites him to it." Or wood can

only be set on fire by means of heat which conveys to it the property of fire. So "in order that the intellect may be united to God in this life, so far as this is possible, it must necessarily use that means that unites it with Him and is most like Him." Now although all creatures are related to God as the Cause and Reason of their existence and all bear some impress of the Creator, yet God is not like creatures nor is there "any essential likeness or connection between them and God, rather, the distance between their being and His Divine Being is infinite; so that it is impossible for the intellect to attain to God by means of creatures, whether celestial or terrestrial; inasmuch as there is no proportion of resemblance between them." No kind of knowledge gained by means of creatures, the exterior or interior senses, "can lead the intellect directly to God . . . in order to attain to Him a soul must rather go by the way of not understanding than by desiring to understand" (cf. *A. II*, iv, 4), "and by blinding itself and putting itself in darkness, rather than by opening its eyes (i.e. of the reasoning and imagination) in order to more closely approach to the Divine ray." By meditation, therefore, "which is a discursive act performed by means of images, forms and figures," which the imagination derives from sensible things, these being the only things which it can use as comparisons and likenesses of Divine things which it has no direct knowledge of, beginners may and ought "to be feeding and enkindling their souls with love by means of sense," employing their reason and imagination in considerations and reflections upon Divine truths, for by these remote means souls "ordinarily pass in order to reach the goal and abode of spiritual repose, but in such a manner that they do pass through them, and not remain in them for ever, for so they would never reach the end, which is not as these remote means, nor has aught to do with them." They are like the stairs by which one goes up to a room, which must be left behind if one is to reach the room, which is other than by the means by which it is reached. So the soul that is to arrive in this life to the union of that full repose and good, by all these grades of considerations, forms and

ideas, must pass through and have done with them, since they have no likeness and bear no proportion to the end to which they lead, which is God. Wherefore St. Paul says in the Acts of the Apostles: *Non debemus æstimare, auro, vel argento, aut lapidi sculpturæ artis, et cogitationis hominis, divinum esse similem.* Which is to say, "We ought not to think of the Godhead nor liken Him to gold or silver, nor to stone formed by art, nor to aught that a man can form in his imagination" (Acts xvii, 29, Vulgate. Note that the sense of *et cogitationis hominis* is obscured in the A.V. "by man's device").

There comes a time, then, when he who would advance toward union with God must leave the practice of meditation, and that time and the manner of the soul's behaviour when it comes is dealt with in chap. xii, 6-9, and xiii-xv of *The Ascent* from the point of view of the soul's activity, and in chaps. ix and x of *The Dark Night* from that of its passivity under the hand and guidance of God, who leads it to and sets it in the beginnings of contemplation. With regard to this passivity, of which something has been said already, we may recall the Saint's teaching that in this new state "the faculties are at rest, and are working, not actively, but passively, by receiving that which God works in them, and if they work at times, it is not with force or with carefully prepared meditations, but with the ease of love, being more moved by God than by their own ability, as will be shown later" (A. II, xii, 8). The first sign by which the spiritual person may know that he is to leave meditation "is his perceiving that he can no longer meditate or reason with his imagination, neither does he find pleasure in so doing as he formerly did; rather, he finds aridity in that upon which he was accustomed to fix his senses and to draw out something substantial. But so long as he is able to reason and find substance in meditation (*Jugo* = sap of plants, metaphorically, the pith or marrow of anything), he should not forsake it, unless his soul be led into the peace and quietude which is described in the third sign."

Two things concur in this first sign, the inability to think

or reason at the time of prayer, and an aridity consequent upon the failure of that sensible devotion which was formerly aroused both by the images formed in the imagination and by the truth and grace, the pith and marrow extracted, as it were, by such consideration of Divine mysteries. But this sign is not sufficient of itself for the soul to cease the endeavour to meditate, since both these things may be due to carelessness or giving way to distractions, lack of due mortification, the degree of which should correspond with advance in prayer, or other reasons. Thus, it must not be at once assumed that an inability to meditate easily or to find sensible consolation in meditation is due to the soul's need of passing to a higher state of prayer, so that it must first examine itself in order to see whether the reason of this inability and aridity is within itself or in some circumstance affecting itself. We must note, too, that this inability to think and reason only occurs at the time of prayer, outside of which these faculties can and should be exercised as aforetime.

The first sign alone, then, will not suffice, the second and third must accompany it. The second is that the soul perceives that "it has no desire to fix the imagination or senses upon other particular things, exterior or interior. I do not say that the imagination does not come and go (for even in times of great recollection it is accustomed to do so loosely), but that the soul takes no pleasure in fixing it purposely upon other things." That is, although when the soul comes to prayer it can no longer think or reason upon the things of God in any definite way or acts yet it has no desire to think, reason or dwell upon anything else, this inability to meditate is not caused by some other preoccupation of the mind, either with itself or with anything outside itself. It cannot *think* of God, it does not want to think of anything else, which would be the case were this state due to some imperfection, distraction or lukewarmness, or, it might be, to some bodily indisposition, such as that species of melancholic ill-humour when one takes no interest in anything, when everything seems to have lost attraction and taste, or, on

the other hand, a certain lotus-like dreaminess, an absence of any desire "but to remain in that pleasant condition of wonder" as of an opium-smoker absorbed in a vague and formless content.

The Saint's very important statement as to the activity of the imagination in times of recollection will be left for later consideration (see p. 280).

"The third and most certain sign is that the soul delights in being alone in a loving attention to God, without any particular consideration, in an interior peace and quietude and rest, without acts or exercises of the faculties, memory, intellect and will, at least, without discursive acts going from one thing to another; but simply with attention and knowledge, general and loving, as we said, without any particular understanding and without comprehending that which it attends to."

It is this desire to be alone in a loving attention to God, devoid of any particular thoughts, reasoning or imaginations, and without any exact knowledge of what is being done, such as could be expressed if we were asked what we were doing in meditation, and a lack of that clarity which results from reasoning and the formation of ideas in the imagination, this quiet contentment, despite the aridity, and distractions of the imagination already mentioned, which, together with the two former signs, enables a soul to discern that the time has come to abandon meditation and "to learn to abide in attention and loving waiting upon God in that quietude, and to take no notice of the imagination or its working" (*A. II, xii, 8*), since it is God who is "beginning to bring them into this supernatural knowledge of contemplation" (*ibid. II, xv, 1*), and their whole work consists in receiving that which He wills in them. If we turn now to chap. viii of the first book of *The Dark Night* it will be plain that St. John is dealing here with the same period of transition from meditation to contemplation in the life of prayer. For he speaks of beginners whom God desires to bring out of their "low manner of love to a higher degree of love for God, and to free them from the low exercise of sense and discursive

reasoning, in which, as we have said, they go about seeking God in such mean ways and with so many obstacles, and to place them in a spiritual exercise wherein they may commune with Him more abundantly and in more freedom from imperfections." For having now made some advance in virtue and through perseverance in meditation and prayer having become detached from love of worldly things and gained spiritual strength, they can now bear a little aridity and difficulty for God's sake without turning back, God turns all their light into darkness so that "they know not whither to go with their senses of imagination and reason; for they cannot advance a step in meditation as they could aforetime . . . and are left in such dryness that not only do they find no substance or delight in the spiritual things and good exercises wherein they had previously found their pleasure and delights, but, in place of this, on the contrary, they find insipidity and bitterness in the said things." This entry into "the blessed night of sense" comes earlier to recollected persons than to others, "ordinarily, no great time elapses between their beginnings and the commencement of their entry into this Night of Sense, and the greater number of them do enter into it, for commonly they will be seen to fall into these aridities." It has been seen already that there are certain states and experiences of the soul which resemble each other so closely that it is not easy at first sight to determine whether they are caused by God or by some mental or physical indisposition, or by imperfections, carelessness or sloth in the soul itself. Aridity or dryness in prayer is such an experience, and St. John proceeds to give three signs by which it may be known whether this is the consequence of the soul's being brought into the passive Night of Sense, or whether it is due to sins or imperfections, weakness or lukewarmness or some bodily condition.

The first of these signs is whether "if when no pleasure or consolation is found in the things of God, neither is it found in anything created; for, as God places the soul in this dark night to the end that He may quench and purge its sensible desire, He deprives it of the desire to find sweet-

ness in anything whatsoever. And in this it may be known as very probable that this aridity and insipidity does not arise from recently committed sins or imperfections. For, if this were the case, the soul would feel in its nature some inclination or desire to taste other things than those of God ; since when the desire indulges itself in some imperfection, small or great, immediately it feels inclined to remain in it, according to the taste and affection which it gave to it. But since this lack of taste either for things above or below might possibly come from some indisposition or melancholy humour, which often forbids the soul to find pleasure in anything, the second sign and condition is necessary."

This is "that ordinarily the memory is drawn to God with painful care and solicitude ; thinking that it is not serving God, but is going backward, because it perceives itself in this insipidity with regard to the things of God." This is a sign that such aridity does not arise from weakness or lukewarmness, for if it were so this solicitude would not exist. . . . And even if this is increased, as it often is, by some bodily condition, it will have a purifying effect upon the desire, since this is drawn to God alone, whereas when it is merely some bodily indisposition everything tends to disgust with and ruin of the physical nature, and a lack of these desires to serve God which belong to purgative aridity. . . . For the cause of this aridity is that God removes to the spirit the good things and strength of the senses, which, as they are now unable to use their natural strength, remain devoid of food, dry and empty. For the sensitive part of human nature has no capacity for that which is pure spirit, and so, when the spirit alone tastes of God, the flesh lacks pleasure and strength to work ; but the spirit being fed goes on in strength, more alert and solicitous than before, in its anxiety not to fail God, and if it does not at once experience spiritual consolation and delight, but only aridity and insipidity, this is because of the novelty of the exchange ; for its palate having been accustomed to the taste of sensible things, upon which its eyes are still fixed, and, because its spiritual palate is not yet accustomed to or purified for such subtle taste,

it cannot experience spiritual taste and good, until it is gradually disposed for it by means of this dry and dark night, but only aridity and lack of pleasure, due to the failure of the pleasure which it had and enjoyed so easily before."

But since the spirit is now being fed on "the food of the strong," and not upon the confectionery beloved by children, it is dimly conscious of receiving substantial strength from this spiritual food now given to it, "which is the beginning of a contemplation which is dry and dark to the senses; which contemplation is secret and hidden from him who experiences it; and, ordinarily, together with the aridity and emptiness it effects in the senses, gives the soul an inclination and desire of being alone and in quietude, without its being able to think of anything in particular or having the wish to do so" (*D.N.* I, ix, 6).

The third sign is "that the soul is no longer able to meditate or reason by the use of the sense of imagination as aforetime, however much it may endeavour to do so; for God now begins to communicate Himself to it, no longer through sense, as was the case, by means of reasonings which both united and divided its knowledge, but by pure spirit, in which there is no succession of thoughts or ideas, communicating Himself by an act of simple contemplation, to which neither the exterior nor interior senses of the lower part of the soul can attain; so that, from now on, the imagination and phantasy cannot gain any help in such consideration" (*ibid.* I, ix, 8).

If this inability to meditate were caused by some bodily indisposition or some unwonted exterior circumstance it would pass with that which caused it, and meditation would become possible again, although some effort might be necessary to regain the habit of it. "But in the purgation of the desire this is not so, the soul having begun to enter into it, the impossibility of reflection with the faculties becomes greater as the soul makes progress." But it must be noted that this only applies to those whom God desires to lead into the dark Night of the Spirit in order that they may come to

the fullest union with Him possible in this life. For there are many whom " God brings into this night of sense only to exercise and humble them, and to reform their desires, that they may not remain in a sinful gluttony in spiritual things. But He does not intend to raise them to the way of the spirit (i.e. the Night of Spirit), which is this contemplation ; for not all those who of set purpose walk in the way of the spirit does God raise to contemplation, nor even the half of them ; the reason, He alone knows " (*el por qué, él se lo sabe*). These souls, therefore, reach a state of transition in which at times they are in aridity and cannot meditate, at other times they are not in aridity and can meditate as before. The Saint deals more fully with this in chap. xv of the second book of *The Ascent*, where he answers the question as to whether those whom " God is beginning to bring " into contemplation, ought never to return to meditation, to which he replies that " in those beginners who are going on to the state of proficients, the habit of contemplation is not yet so perfect that they can attain to the act of it whenever they wish to do so, nor, for the same reason, have they so passed beyond meditation, that at times they cannot meditate or reason in a natural way as formerly, by means of the figures and steps they once used, finding something new in them. Rather, in these beginnings, when by the indications already given, they are enabled to see that the soul is not occupied in that rest and knowledge, they should make use of meditation, until by it they come to acquire the habit we have described, in some manner of perfection, which will be when every time they try and meditate, they at once find themselves in this knowledge and peace, and are not able to meditate or desire to do so. Until they come to such time, which is that of those who are proficient in this exercise, they must practise one or the other, at different times " (*A. II, xv, 1*). This applies to all souls, to those who never get beyond the early degrees of contemplation as to those whom God raises to the fullest experience of it.

We may now sum up the factors which constitute the

essence and give the explanation of this crisis in the spiritual life.

1. It is caused by God Himself with the intention of leading the soul out of its childish and immature ways to an adult, more truly spiritual life.

2. To this end He brings the soul into the Night of Sense, or more exactly, into the second part of that Night, which St. John calls the Night of Faith which, he says, "the soul ordinarily enters in two ways, the one active; the other passive. The active way consists in that which the soul can do, and does, of itself in order to enter therein . . . the passive is that in which the soul does nothing, but God works in it, whilst it remains patient as it were" (*D.N.* I, xiii, 1). "Patient" is here used in the theological sense of the passive capacity of the soul to receive God (cf. Dionysius' "*patiens divina*," and *A.* II, xxxii, 4).

3. This Night of Faith which is also the beginning of contemplation prevents the activity of the natural faculties in the prayer of meditation, and thereby causes aridity and darkness in the senses and faculties, so that the soul no longer finds any attraction to or delight either in natural or spiritual things, whilst, despite this aridity and darkness, and much wandering of the imagination, it has an even greater desire for God than hitherto and only desires to remain in a quiet, general loving attention to Him.

The first cause of all this is, as we have said, God Himself, but there are secondary causes which require attention. The first of these is that the time has come when the soul has derived all the good it can from the things of God by the practice of meditation. Each soul has a handicap in this matter, a point beyond which to go on practising meditation will be fruitless, since all the fruit which it is possible for the soul to gain in this particular way has been gathered, so that to go on reflecting upon Divine mysteries only produces boredom, headaches and weariness. This is not, of course, because the truths of God themselves are exhausted, but simply because the soul cannot learn or gain anything more from them by *thinking* about them in its prayer-time. Also,

since the reasoning and imaginative faculties have come to a stop, the sensible affections fail and dry up, no longer are easily evoked by the consideration of Divine things, so that any acts the soul makes, of faith, hope, love, etc., are purely of the will, forced acts made without any or little feeling, so that the soul is tempted to ask itself whether such acts are any good since it does not *feel* what it says, and is apt to accuse itself of having lost both faith and fervour. For it has yet to learn that faith and love are most perfect when they are purely willed acts to which the senses contribute nothing, and that fervour consists in exactly what St. John describes as an aridity of the senses coupled with a growing desire for God and the adherence of the will to Him in love. To love the things of God and the practices of religion for the pleasure and good received in them is not love for God, any more than human love for the gifts bestowed by another is love of the person who gives them. The truest test of love is when it survives the loss of all but the loved one himself.

The second reason must be quoted in full, as it has for many years formed the centre of a vivid and still existent controversy upon the question of what is known as "acquired," as distinguished from "infused" contemplation (see chap. xvi). It is that "at this time the soul already has both the substance and the habit of the spirit of meditation. For it is to be known that the end of meditation and reasoning upon the things of God is to gain some knowledge and love of God, and each time the soul does this by meditation it is an act; and just as many acts, of whatever kind they may be, come to form a habit in the soul, so many of these acts of loving knowledge which the soul has been making in particular times, come by such continuous repetition to form a habit in the soul. This same thing God is wont also to effect in many souls without the use of these acts (or, at least, without many such acts preceding it), by placing them at once in contemplation. Thus, that which the soul has been gaining gradually by its labour of meditation upon particular objects, has now through such practice, as we have said, become changed and turned into a habit

and substance of a general, loving knowledge, no longer distinct or particular as before. Wherefore, in giving itself to prayer, the soul is now as one who, having water brought to him, drinks sweetly without labour, no longer finding it necessary to draw it through the aqueducts of past considerations, forms and figures, so that, as soon as the soul places itself before God, it finds itself in an act of knowledge, confused, loving, peaceful and tranquil wherein it drinks of wisdom, love and delight " (A. II, xiv, 2).

As touching the behaviour of the soul thus brought into this new and unaccustomed state, it is essential, except in the case already mentioned when meditation is possible, that it should not endeavour or be directed to return to meditation under the feeling or pretext that it is doing nothing, as do many who think that meditation is the whole of the prayer life, so that when they find themselves in this " loving quiet " in which, indeed, they would like to remain, they are tempted to think that such inactivity of the faculties is a waste of time. This arises partly from the strangeness of this state and partly from the fact that being naturally active persons most people are apt to imagine that unless they are doing something, nothing is being done. The necessity of a great deal of activity in the early stages of the spiritual life helps to confirm this idea and to cause the fact of the vastly greater importance of the surrender to and receiving of God's activity to recede into the background. Thus when they find that reasoned meditation and formal acts have become impossible and the endeavour to make them only causes weariness and distaste, they think that they are going back and losing all that has been gained. But the truth is that " they are losing themselves, although not in the way they think, for they are becoming lost to their own senses and to their former manner of perceiving and understanding, whilst this is the gaining of that spirituality which is now being given to them " (A. II, xiv, 4), a knowledge of God which, as the Apostle says, " passes all understanding." For the soul has only two kinds of activity, one, that of working with its natural faculties, the other of

receiving that which is given to it. "By means of the sensitive faculties it is able to reason and search out and gain knowledge of things ; and by means of the spiritual faculties it can enjoy the fruit of the knowledge already received by the exercise of the said faculties, without their now taking part actively therein." The difference between the exercise of the faculties may be compared to that between working for and enjoying the fruit of one's labour ; or between the exertion of a journey and the rest at the end ; or between preparing a meal and enjoying it ; between receiving a gift and profiting by the use of it (*A. II, xiv, 6, 7*).

Thus when meditation becomes impossible for the reasons already given, the spiritual person must "learn to remain in a loving attention to God, in quietness of mind, although it seems to him that he is doing nothing. For so, little by little, and very quickly, Divine peace and calm will be infused into his soul with admirable and lofty knowledge of God, enwrapped in Divine love. And let him not meddle with forms, meditations or imaginations or any reasoning ; that the soul be not disturbed and drawn from its contentment and peace, which can only bring about distaste and repugnance. And if, as we have said, he has scruples, thinking that he is doing nothing, let him see that it is no small thing to pacify his soul and bring it into this calm and peace, without any other working and desire, which is what our Lord asks of us through David, saying : *Vacate, et videte quoniam ego sum Deus*. As if he had said : 'Learn to be empty of all things (that is to say, interiorly and exteriorly), and you shall see that I am God' (*Ps. xlv, 11, Vulg., A.V. xlv, 10*, has, 'Be still, and know that I am God')."

A further characteristic of this entry into contemplation which takes place in the Night of Faith is that the general, confused loving knowledge of God that now takes the place of that reasoned, particular knowledge gained in meditation "is at times so subtle and delicate, especially when it is most pure, simple and perfect, most spiritual and interior, that, although the soul is occupied in it, it can neither

perceive nor feel it," and this will be so in the degree that the soul is freed from any attachment to particular kinds of knowledge, and especially in the beginning of this state. The reason of this failure on the part of the soul to perceive or realize what is being given and going on within it is not only the delicacy and purely spiritual nature of the Divine operation, but the fact that the soul, being so used to the clear and distinct particular knowledge gained in meditation, has need of becoming accustomed to this new and stronger light which now flows directly into the spirit instead of indirectly and in a divided manner through the reasoning and imaginative faculties (A. II, xiii, 7 ; xiv, 8 ; D.N. I, xi, 1). What, indeed, is experienced first is the dryness and emptiness which arise from the inability of the faculties to operate as they have been accustomed to do, and the fears that the soul is doing nothing and is losing ground, all of which tends to disturb and trouble it in such ways as the Saint has described in the Prologue to *The Ascent* and other parts of his writings. It was this fact, intensified by the lack of knowledge of this state of transition, even amongst directors, of whom St. John has severe things to say, that led him to write, and that in the extremely careful manner in which he endeavours to make his teaching as clear and free from misconception as possible. In the beginning of this Night of Faith the soul "is like one who has begun a cure, all is suffering in this dark and dry purgation of the desire, by which it is healed of many imperfections and exercises itself in many virtues, in order that out of its care and solicitude for God" it grows in desire for Him alone and is inflamed with love for Him, without perceiving any particular cause thus moving the soul, since the reason is that the contemplation which is beginning "is naught else than a secret, peaceful and loving infusion of God, which, if it be surrendered to, inflames the soul with the spirit of love" (D.N. I, x, 6).

Another effect which sometimes results when the Divine light begins to shine upon the soul, and with less force than when the soul is more purged from sensible and particular

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things, is that the soul is plunged into a total forgetfulness of all things, even the passing of time being unnoticed, so that even if, as may be, some hours are spent in prayer, it seems as but a moment, in somewhat of the manner in which one may be struck by and absorbed in a beautiful landscape or in exquisite music so that everything else is forgotten, "all movement of thought is checked ; in place of the movement of thought there is the activity of receptive rest ; in place of the apprehended movement of time there is

The moment eternal, just that and no more
When ecstasys utmost we catch at the core."

Such prayer will seem to be very short although actually it may have gone on for a long period, "for the soul has been united in pure intelligence, which is not of time ; this is that brief prayer which is said to pierce the heavens, because it is brief, and is not of time . . . so although the soul in this state of knowledge in which it seems to do nothing, nor to be occupied with anything, since it is working neither with the senses nor the faculties, must believe that it is not wasting time. For, although the harmony of the faculties of the soul cease, its intellect is as we have said " (A. II, xiv, 10, 11). That is, the intellect is engaged in the highest act possible to it, that of intuitive contemplation, and the will follows it in love. But just as in the cases of absorption in natural things mentioned above one does not advert to or perceive what one is doing, so here, the soul has no perception of this high activity, a fact expressed in the ancient saying, "There can be no perfect prayer if the religious himself is aware that he is praying" (Cassian, *Conf.* ix). In the prayer of meditation any knowledge is reached by, or if given, is translated into images and ideas of a particular nature so that they can be seen with some degree of distinctness and clarity. But in contemplation this cannot be done since the faculties are inhibited from working, so that the loving knowledge infused by God is said to be general and confused, the latter term meaning not "in confusion," but as a whole before which the analytical activity of the

reason and the picturing activity of the imagination is powerless. From its nature, the human mind is normally incapable of apprehending or comprehending anything as a whole, its always partial knowledge of the whole of anything is only gained by a process of analysis and reasoning in which the whole under consideration is, as it were, taken to pieces, each part being examined separately and in relation to the whole, viewed from one angle and another, so that finally the separate parts can be built up again with some knowledge of what the whole is in itself. But such knowledge is always incomplete since never can the whole be seen in its wholeness, all at once, completely and perfectly. But the mind does possess the capacity, varying with individuals, of a natural, æsthetic and religious intuition or contemplation in which, however, whilst the whole is more fully embraced, it at the same time loses distinctness, that perception of its parts gained by analytic reflection, etc., is merged into and submerged by a general, all-comprehending view, "confused," as St. John says. To study a section of country in order to make a map or survey of it is a very different thing, and results in a very different kind of knowledge to that gained by simply contemplating it as a whole, and the latter lacks the detail and distinctness of the former, whilst, on the other hand, it gives a wider, more satisfying and enjoyable knowledge. And it is essential to such contemplation and, indeed, a consequence of it, that thought, reasoning, analysing and so on should be held suspended and inactive, the highest, intuitive act of the mind alone being engaged. This is precisely what St. John teaches as necessary to and the fruit of the "simple act of contemplation," an act of the "pure intellect" succeeding to the analytic, reasoned successive acts of formal meditation.

The contrast between the two activities of meditation and contemplation is well expressed by Dr. Temple. "It is the characteristic of æsthetic and moral appreciation that in them we become absorbed in the object itself, as a single whole, and understand it by letting it take possession of us, whereas in science we understand partly from setting the

object in an ever-widening context and learning what forces mould it from without, and partly by breaking it up analytically into its own constituent elements" (*Christus Veritas*, p. 20).

One last point requires attention. The Saint says that even in times of "great recollection" the imagination is apt to wander from one thing to another, even though the soul has no desire or intention to attend to particular things (*A. II*, xiii, 3; xiv, 5), and the fact that this is so leads many to suppose that such distractions make the prayer of loving attention so impossible and useless that it would be better to return to meditation, to some form of vocal prayer, or to reading, or worse, to give up prayer for some active occupation. Now it must be seen that the real trouble lies, not in these imaginative distractions, but in the failure to understand and deal with them, since if they are rightly understood and dealt with, they rather help than hinder the prayer. First of all, the distinction, so emphasized by St. John, between the higher and the lower part of the soul must be remembered. To the higher part belong the intellect and will, to the lower part, the imagination, senses and emotions, whether of pleasure or pain. In the early stages of the spiritual, as in the physical life, it is the lower part of the soul which is most in evidence. In many persons this remains the case, and when this is so the truth or goodness of religion is estimated by the sensible reactions and emotions which it causes—or fails to cause. But the main object of the Christian religion, at least, is to aid us to behave as rational, self-determining beings in whom the lower part of our nature is governed by the higher, the senses and emotions by the intellect and will. It is the latter, then, which matter most, and which experience shows, are capable of acting even when the senses, imagination and emotions do not follow them. For instance, it is possible to apply the intellect to, say, some difficult problem, or to something which must be attended to, even whilst the imagination and emotions are revolving round some pleasure or pain. It is possible to will to cross a deep ravine by a narrow plank or

slippery tree trunk, although one may be suffering from "funk" which may be caused by the imagination or by some physical disturbance of the body. In both cases the disturbance in the lower part of the soul still goes on, and one is conscious of it, but the intellect and will remain fixed upon the object or intention before them. So that in reality these do not matter so long as the intellect and will are not carried away by them. This, of course, may and probably will happen at times, as a painful or pleasurable image diverts the mind or a spasm of fear shakes the will for a moment, only to be shaken off when perceived, not by a negative attempt to get rid of them altogether, which is impossible, but a positive return of the attention to what is required to be done, whilst the disturbance, whatever it may be, is simply "put up with" in the sense of "what can't be cured must be endured." (It is the same with many temptations, endurance without surrender, not getting rid of them, is the victory.)

In the prayer of loving attention or simple contemplation the intellect and will are directed toward God, but as yet the imagination and emotions are not perfectly brought into union with the higher faculties, as is the case later, nor are being used, as in meditation; they "act on their own," going to and fro like butterflies on a summer's day, every now and then settling down upon something which attracts them. Thus it is not unlikely that in the outset of this prayer these distractions will be more numerous and more noticeable, since the intellect and will are less actively occupied, as when one who has been working at some task ceases, the noise of traffic on the road outside, hitherto unadverted to, is plainly heard and becomes annoying. What, then, is to be remembered is, that these distractions do not matter unless they are willed, or the mind and will are allowed to be drawn after them. As a matter of fact, they are not usually, at least, willed, nor are they consciously noticed until the mind begins to reflect upon them and then perceives them, at which moment, *there is only one thing to do*, and that is to bring the mind and will gently back to God. There is not

the slightest use in making a fuss about it, or in being discouraged or annoyed with oneself. All this does hinder and spoil prayer, but to treat them in the way we have said, actually helps and improves it. For each time this return is made to God, it is nothing less than a choice of God in preference to anything else, beside which, each such act strengthens the will so that it is less easily drawn away from Him. In addition to this, many spiritual guides point out that such distractions are often God's will for us and should be accepted, not willed or indulged, but accepted as the state He desires for us, just as at times, He wills that His servants should be plunged in adverse and trying circumstances. We are not to choose persecution of one kind or another, in fact, the Christian life ought to become a non-choosing of anything except as God wills or allows it, an abandonment to His will in all things. So we are not to choose distractions, nor is it any good, in our prayer-time, to fight and attempt to drive them away, for this only makes matters worse, the only thing, we repeat, is to turn gently and quietly to God and, if necessary, to accept and endure such distractions as God wills.

THE increasing surrender of the soul to the guidance and operation of God demands and marks its entry into the Night of Faith, and all its further progress. This surrender has both an active and passive side, since it calls for the active endeavour on the part of the soul to free itself from whatever hinders the operation of God, which endeavour renders it more supple under the Divine influence, allowing it to operate more strongly and completely until the whole of the soul's activity is so penetrated and permeated with that of the work of God in the union of love (S.C. xi, 6, 7 ; xvii, 4), which state of Divine union " consists in the soul's being totally transformed, according to the will, in the will of God, to such a degree that there may be nothing in it that is contrary to the will of God, but that in all and by all its movement may be solely that of the will of God " (A. I, xi, 2).

St. John, following St. Thomas, makes a distinction between the substance of the soul and its faculties, saying of the " obscure habit of union " with God that " with regard to the act, as we shall show, with the Divine favour, there is no permanent union in the faculties in this life, but only a transitory one " (A. II, v, 1, 2 ; S.C., 2nd edit. xxvi, 11 ; L.F. i, 21). In the second and third books of *The Ascent*, he treats of the active manner in which the three faculties—intellect, memory and will—are to be brought into the second half of the Night of Sense in which, just as in the first half, the exterior senses were detached from the desire of sensible things, so in this " spiritual " night (not to be confounded with the Night of the Spirit), the faculties of the higher nature, which are spiritual, i.e. immaterial operations, are to be purified and emptied of all that is not God. The means by which this is to be effected are the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, " by means of which the soul is

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united to God according to its faculties," in preparation for that fuller union which is according to the substance of the soul.

Faith purifies, empties and "perfects the intellect" by informing it with a new knowledge which does not depend upon processes of reasoning and the like but solely upon God, as St. Thomas says, "Faith is a kind of participation in God's truth," which "gives persistence and stability to his apprehension," since "it withdraws the mind from the realm of nature and sense, and sets it on the foundation of intelligible things" (*De Potentia*, II, vi, 9). Faith, then, causes an emptiness and darkness in the intellect according to its natural manner of operation, which is that of reasoning and imagination, withdrawing it from the things of sense and from its low manner of working, reason being a defect of the intellect, in order to bring it to, and perfect its highest capacity, that of intuitive contemplation, the act of "pure intelligence," as St. John calls it.

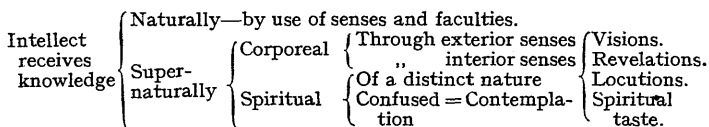
Hope effects the same results in the memory, that storehouse of images and ideas formed by the imagination, of which it needs to be emptied and dispossessed, since they are even a greater hindrance to the soul than the possession of external things. Thus hope, which is of that which is not possessed, for, as the Apostle says, "Hope which is seen, is not hope : for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for ?" (Rom. viii, 24), removes the attention of the memory from its present possessions, that emptying itself of these, it may hope and "wait with patience" for the things of God. So "charity causes emptiness in the will with regard to all things, since it obliges us to love Him above all ; which cannot be unless we detach our affection from them all in order to set it entirely upon God," which is clear from the words of our Lord Himself (Luke xiv, 33 ; x, 27, etc.).

It will be well at this point to refer to the second chapter of the third book of *The Ascent*, in which the Saint reminds his readers both of the purpose for which he writes and to whom he addresses himself, lest they should fall into the error of imagining, as did some of his contemporaries and

certain critics of modern times who have attacked his teaching on the ground that it involved the negation and destruction of human nature and its operation rather than the perfecting of it. To this St. John points out that he is not speaking of or to "beginners," i.e. here, those who are practising meditation, and need to use their natural faculties in the normal way of thinking, reasoning, and so on, but to "those who would progress farther in contemplation, even to union with God, in order to accomplish which progress, all these means and sensible exercises of the faculties must be left behind in silence, in order that God Himself may effect Divine union in the soul, which must proceed by this method of disembarassing and emptying itself, denying to the faculties their natural jurisdiction and operation so that place may be made for the supernatural infusion and illumination ; since their capacity cannot attain to so high an undertaking, but rather hinders it, if it be not set on one side." Such renunciation of the lower operations of the faculties, which normally belongs only to this time of prayer, may in its beginnings occasionally affect them at other times, so as to cause a suspension of memory, in which a soul may "fall into many faults in outward behaviour, forgetting to eat and drink, not remembering what it has done, whether it has seen or said this or that or not, because of the absorption of its memory in God." But when the habit of union is attained, this is so no longer, since now the soul does all that is right and necessary in a much more perfect manner than before, because all its faculties are possessed by God who moves them in a Divine way according to His will and spirit. Thus the whole purpose of the negation and cessation of the natural activity of the faculties is to free them from their low manner of working so that this may not impede the desire of God to raise them to the exercise of their fullest capacities. The spiritual man, the supernatural man, the Saint is more, not less man than the carnal man, bound within the limitations of his natural activity. He is more man because grace and the virtues enable the highest exercise of his faculties, bring his whole nature out of disorder into

harmony, and save him from that dissipation of himself upon things less than himself which is common to other men. In this same chapter St. John is explicit upon the fact, that whilst God alone can place the soul in this supernatural state, "yet the soul, as far as is possible to it, must be continually preparing itself; which it can do by its natural power especially with the aid that God is always giving it. Thus, in the manner that the soul itself enters into this negation and self-emptying of forms, so God begins to give it the possession of union; and this He works passively in the soul, as we shall say, God willing, in treating of the passive Night of the Soul; and so, when He pleases, and according to the disposition of the soul, He will give it the habit of perfect and Divine union." We have now to follow St. John in his description of the means by which this self-emptying of the faculties is to be actively taken in hand; and first, with regard to the intellect.

All knowledge comes to the intellect through two channels, one natural, i.e. by means of the senses and faculties, the other, supernatural, by means which convey knowledge which neither the senses nor the faculties can attain to by themselves. This supernatural knowledge is given, either by means of the exterior or interior bodily senses, and is of two kinds, that which is of a distinct and particular nature, and that which is confused, obscure and general. To the first belong visions, revelations, locutions and spiritual taste, all of which are communicated to the intellect directly not by means of the senses (A. II, xxiii). The second is of one kind alone, contemplation given in faith. A diagram will make this clearer.



We are only here concerned with the supernatural, and first of any supernatural manifestation which may be perceptible to the exterior senses, such as appearances of Saints

or angels, words heard by the ears, perfumes recognized by the sense of smell, sensible affection and like things experienced by the bodily senses. All such manifestations may come from God, but the more they are of a physical nature the less it is likely that they do so, indeed, it is more likely that they are the work of the devil who uses such things to deceive the soul, causing error, presumption and vanity, since it too readily and wrongly imagines that because these so strongly affect the senses, they are of importance, whereas the truth is that God most communicates Himself to the spirit, and anyone who places reliance in such exterior things is in grave danger of deception and of losing faith. No attention, then, must be given to them, nor any seeking to know whether they are true or false ; they must be rejected as possible occasions of evil. For if they are of God the result and fruit which He desires them to produce will effect itself in the spirit without any need of the soul's effort, penetrating therein as the rays of the sun through a window, and moving the soul to greater spiritual blessings (*A. II, xi*).

We have already spoken of the work of the imagination and phantasy in relation both to natural knowledge and to that which is gained by meditation, so that all that need be said here is that, since nothing which can be imagined is anything like God, and only serves for a time as a remote means of approaching Him, all these imaginations must be cast out, "no heed being paid to the imagination or its working" so that the soul may rest with its intellect and will in loving attention to God by faith alone (*ibid. xii*). This is true also of imaginary visions which may be presented directly to the soul "in this mirror of the phantasy and imagination," and which, whilst they may be of God, may also be of the devil, as may be seen in Holy Scripture, wherein both are recorded. In fact, the sense of imagination is one through which Satan most frequently attempts to gain an entrance into the soul, so that great control is needed over it, not only to keep out that which is plainly evil, but that which, however good it may appear to be, is of necessity represented in the imagination under forms and notions

derived from earthly things and so unlike God, who "comes not within any image or form, nor is contained within anything of the particular." Thus they must not be desired or received, for as has been said already about corporeal visions, etc., so is it true of these imaginary ones, any good God desires to confer by them will be produced in the soul passively, and the more so as the soul detaches itself from the imaginary form under which such good may come. For that good is of so purely spiritual a nature that the soul can neither apprehend nor understand it, much less express it. A valuable illustration of the need of preferring faith to any kind of vision is given by St. Peter in his second epistle wherein, after speaking of the vision of the Transfiguration, he goes on to say, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy," to which he attaches more importance, since faith is greater than sight, and as St. Paul says, "Faith cometh by hearing" (A. II, xvi).

But it will be asked, if all this is true, why does God give visions, since they may be such occasions of danger, and especially since He can communicate with the soul directly without these means?

St. John answers by sketching the manner by which God gradually raises the soul, leading it according to its nature, from its natural to a supernatural manner of operation, in something of the way in which a teacher acts with children, or a parent gives the particular kind of food required at each stage of a child's growth. So God "instructs the soul, communicating spiritual things to it first of all through outward and palpable things" suited to its weakness and incapacity, so that it may grow up and gain true and Divine spirituality, which has nothing to do with sense. So in the degree that it receives and feeds upon the food given to it in its spiritual childhood, at the same time it grows out of and detached from the things of sense, as St. Paul says of himself, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man I put away childish things" (1 Cor. xiii, 11). As regards meditation, this must not be left until God brings the soul into the

state of contemplation ; but as to all imaginary visions which are given passively without man's co-operation, " I say that at no time or season must it receive them," first, because to attend to them is not necessary for the receiving of the spiritual good God intends, and, second, that the soul may not give itself to the labour and danger of trying to distinguish between good and evil visions, which is only a waste of time, since it cannot really know, a hindrance to its progress and a source of many errors and imperfections (*A. II, xvii*).

Directors must not set value on these visions, etc., and so encourage their penitents to do so, for " the spirit of the disciple grows in conformity with that of his spiritual master in a hidden and secret manner," so that if the director has an inclination to such things, this will impress itself upon the disciple, who will grow to esteem them. Let not, then, the director speak of these things or try and show his penitents how to distinguish between good and evil visions ; nor if he sees that they are receiving visions from God, beg them to ask God to grant him similar favours, or to talk about these matters, so that " foolish souls " do as he asks, supposing that because it pleases God to reveal something by supernatural means, it is lawful to desire and beg Him to do so. Then if He answers them they imagine that He is pleased to do so, whereas this is not so, and they believe and act according to that which He has revealed or to the way in which they have been answered, so attached are they to their own way of communion with God. First they think that the vision is of God since it agrees with their own disposition, and then that since it was of God it would turn out as they expected. " But herein is a great deception, for revelations or locutions which are of God do not always turn out as men think or dream they will. And thus they must never be blindly believed and trusted, even though they are known to be revelations or answers or words of God. For although they may be certain and true in themselves they are not always so in their causes or in our way of understanding them " (*ibid. xviii*).

These two reasons are explained in the following chapter.

First, of these visions it is true that "things are not always what they seem," nor do they turn out as we expect. Abraham, for instance, was deceived by his own manner of interpreting God's promise that He would give him the land of the Canaanites (Gen. xv, 7). Jacob, to whom God's promise to bring him out of Egypt, as we might interpret it, was actually only fulfilled in his descendants at the Exodus. So souls may be deceived by clinging to the apparent and literal sense, whereas the important thing is the spiritual sense. St. John goes on to give examples from the prophecies, especially those which concern our Lord, which were so misunderstood by the Jews; and of other cases, as that of one in great persecution to whom God says, "I will deliver thee from all thine enemies" which is indeed fulfilled, though it may not be as the person expected by a temporal deliverance, but by his being put to death.

The second reason is that many things which God reveals depend for their fulfilment upon secondary causes, to be found in men and things, which are contingent and variable. Thus God may, as in the cases of Nineveh and of King Ahab, pronounce that a certain punishment will overtake that city and king, which, however, does not come to pass because of the repentance of the Ninevites and of Ahab. Again, as with our Lord's words to His disciples, many things are said or done by God which can only be understood at a later time, as and when God wills. In truth, there is no full understanding of the meaning of the words and acts of God "whose ways are past finding out," so that "we must have confidence, not in understanding, but in faith" (A. II, xx).

There are some spiritually minded persons who think it right to try and know certain things by supernatural methods, imagining that because they are sometimes answered by these means God approves of them, whereas, on the contrary, He is displeased, and His very answers are more signs of this than His silence would be. The reason of His displeasure is "that it is not lawful for any creature to go beyond the natural limits that God has ordained for it." But why does God answer, then? "I reply that sometimes it is the devil

who answers. But when it is God, I say that it is because of the weakness of the soul that wishes to use that way, lest it should be disconsolate and turn back, or should think that God is angry with it and be much troubled ; or for other reasons known to Him." For God, as it were, adapts Himself to His creatures, sometimes allowing them to draw water by extraordinary means, but this must not be taken to mean that whatever He allows is lawful. There are some souls who will not or do not know how to walk by any road than that of sensible consolations, and God grants such to their weakness although He would rather give them the solid food of " the trials of the cross of His Son."

But to seek knowledge by supernatural means is a much worse thing than desiring sensible consolations, and is, at least, venial sin. " For there is no need of such practices, since there is a natural reason, and an evangelical doctrine and law, which are entirely sufficient for the guidance of souls," and nothing should be sought for or received by supernatural means than that which conforms to reason and evangelical law, a rule, we may note, always followed by the Church in forming judgments upon revelations, etc., which the Saints and holy persons claim to have received. The sanity and balance of St. John is well evidenced in his laying down that, ordinarily, reason and common means should be employed, and if these fail, there is nothing better than prayer. Nor is his treatment of the work of the devil in this matter less sound. He does not dismiss all such occurrences as due to him, but says that ordinarily he is responsible for many of them, disguising himself as an angel of light, setting before the soul things which are similar to those of God, so that he can hardly be recognized. Thus, since his knowledge is very great, many of the things he says are true and do come to pass, so that it is easy for the soul to think that because this is so, it must be of God. For instance, the devil knows the laws which govern the universe of matter so that he can foretell such things as pestilences and earthquakes by the natural knowledge he possesses, which foretelling souls are apt to attribute to God, when it is the devil who,

because of his angelic reason, knows what effects will probably follow certain causes, as in a less perfect way men who study nature can. So also, either by reason or by his long experience of God's ways, he may know supernatural things to a much greater extent than is commonly recognized, and use such knowledge to deceive souls whom grosser means would not influence (*A. II, xxi*, the application of all this to various forms of "spiritualism," fortune-telling, and the like is obvious).

One sufficient reason—to which the Saint devotes a long chapter (*xxii*)—why although under the old law men were permitted to seek visions and revelations from God but are now forbidden to do so, is that then "faith was not well founded nor the Evangelical law established. . . . But now that the faith is established in Christ, and the evangelical law manifested in this era of grace, there is no reason to inquire of God after this manner, nor for Him to speak or answer as He did then. For in giving us, as He did, His Son, who is His Word, and He has no other, He spake to all of us, once for all in this single Word, and has nothing more to say." So that he who would seek to know anything from God, save through Christ, not only acts foolishly, but offends God "by not setting his eyes solely upon Christ," God's final and inexhaustible Word, "in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," and of whom He declares, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear Him. . . . So in all things we must be guided by the law of Christ made man, and that of His Church and ministers, in human and visible ways, and by these means remedy our ignorances and spiritual weakness, for in these we shall find abundant medicine for them all." God has given the government and direction of every man into the hands of other men, so that even if anything be revealed supernaturally to one, it must not be thought to be true until it is confirmed by the Church. Nor should anyone think that because God and the Saints commune with him about many things, that they will reveal his faults to him, when these could be known by ordinary means, "for ordinarily, God neither works

nor reveals anything that can be accomplished by human counsel and industry."

Any soul who receives such visions and revelations should at once inform its director. First, because what God may reveal is only confirmed by him who occupies the place of a spiritual judge. Second, because the soul needs instruction upon that which passes within it, so that it may be led on to faith and not fall back into the ways of sense. Third, because of the humility, submission and mortification entailed. Thus whilst confessors should not encourage their penitents to discuss these things, on the other hand, they should not rebuff them, but quietly encourage them if they see occasion, and above all "directing them in faith, teaching them plainly to turn away their eyes from all these things, and instructing them how to detach the desire and the spirit from them that they may advance, giving them to understand how much more precious in the sight of God is one work or act of the will performed in charity than all these visions and communications they may have from heaven, since these give neither merit or demerit; and many souls, who have had none of these things, are in comparison much farther advanced than those who have received many" (A. II, xxii).

We now come to purely spiritual apprehensions received in the intellect, i.e. those which are presented to it directly, not, as those we have been considering, through the senses or imagination. They are known as intellectual visions, which are understood by the intellect, and are said to be seen in the sense that we commonly say "I see," meaning that we understand. Thus, since we have no other terms in which to express purely spiritual things than those which we use of physical things, we have to speak of spiritual visions as seen by the intellect, revelations and locutions as heard and other spiritual communications as tasted or perceived after the manner in which the senses see and hear taste, touch and smell. But this is not the whole of the matter, since, at least from the second century, it has been maintained by the Fathers, theologians and spiritual writers

that the " spiritual senses " are actual apprehending faculties capable of exercising similar functions in the spiritual sphere as do the bodily senses in the physical. This doctrine first appears to have been formulated by Origen, who interprets those passages of Scripture which speak of tasting, hearing, seeing and experiencing Divine, spiritual realities, as not simply metaphorical but as referring to actual faculties of the intellect or spirit. Thus he speaks of " senses which have nothing of the sensible," are " superior to that which is corporeal " being " spiritual," " immortal," " divine." Of these spiritual, interior senses, our Lord is " the True Light which illumines the eyes of the soul ; the Word, who is to be heard ; the Bread of Life who is to be tasted, the Word made flesh, that the spiritual man may come to the Word of Life." These senses need to be delivered from those of the body, the eye of the soul only sees clearly as that of natural sight is closed. They are developed by the study of Divine things, meditation upon the mystical sense of Holy Scripture, but, above all, by the exercise of faith. The same doctrine is found in Cassian, Evagrius, Diadoke, Macarius, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nyssa and other Fathers, as in St. Augustine, especially in chap. x of his *Confessions*, " O my God, what is it that I love when I love Thee ? not beauty of bodies, not the fair harmony of time, nor the brightness of light, so gladdening to the eyes, nor sweet melodies of varied songs, nor the fragrant scent of flowers, ointments, nor the taste of honey and manna, nor bodily embrace. None of these do I love, when I love my God. Yet I love a kind of light, and melody and fragrance, and food and embrace, experienced within, where there shineth that which space cannot contain, and there soundeth what time beareth not away, and a perfume is caught that the wind disperses not, and that is tasted which eating diminisheth not, and there is embraced what satiety divorceth not " (*Conf.* X, vi). So the doctrine passes down through the Victorines, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, St. Albert the Great to St. Thomas, who discusses the subject with Peter Lombard, and holds that the spiritual senses actually exist in man, yet are

not distinct faculties from the intellect but only ways by which it apprehends Divine realities directly, as do the angels, that is, as St. John says, without any intervening medium formed in the phantasy or imagination.

Spiritual visions are of two kinds, corporeal, in which are included all material things in heaven and earth which, by a special light of God, may be seen by the soul in this life, as St. John the Evangelist describes in the Apocalypse, and as St. Gregory the Great records of St. Benedict that he had a vision in which he saw the whole world in a single glance. The other kind is of incorporeal beings, God Himself, angels and souls separated from the body, who cannot be seen in this life, save under some form assumed by them, as when angels are seen in the form of men, or again, in such exceptional cases as the visions of Moses, Elijah and St. Paul, in which they were rapt out of their natural conditions, as the latter implies. "But although such visions cannot be seen in this life, but only in heaven where God is seen by the intellect illumined by the light of glory, they can nevertheless be felt in the substance of the soul, with sweetest touches and unions, which pertain to spiritual feelings, of which, with the Divine favour, we shall treat later, for our pen is being directed and drawn to these, that is, to the Divine union of the soul with the Divine Substance."

The devil can cause similar visions "by means of a natural light in which, by spiritual suggestion, he makes things known in the mind," as appears from St. Matthew's account of the temptation of our Lord in which the devil showed Him "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," which was not possible to bodily sight. But it should be noted that whilst the latter give the soul a distaste for the things of God and lead to self-esteem, those which come from God result in quietude, illumination, joy, sweetness, purity, love, humility and elevation of the spirit to God. Yet, it must be repeated, the soul must have no desire to rest in or treasure the forms of such visions as are imprinted upon it, for although they may aid it to a certain love for God,

detachment from all things in pure faith does so much more and the more it walks by faith alone, so the more it grows in hope and love, since these virtues go together (*Conf. X*, xxiv). Under the second kind of spiritual apprehensions, that is, revelations, are included truths or mysteries which God causes the intellect to understand, and the making known of certain things which He is doing or intends to do. St. John is not referring here to God's revelation in general so much as those made to individuals, whom by this means He causes to comprehend and see with the intellect truths of things whether past, present or future, to the last of which belongs the gift of prophecy. This knowledge of "naked truths" which is that of intellectual intuition, may be of God or of creatures, the former of which, although it is treated here, belongs to "pure contemplation" in the state of union, "for they are themselves that union; for they are a touch of the Divinity experienced in the soul, so that it is God Himself who is perceived and tasted therein." It is a knowledge directly imparted by God, not attained by any activity of the natural faculties, which conveys so high and great a sense of some attribute of God, of His omnipotence, might, goodness or graciousness, that the truth perceived cleaves to the soul, and cannot be expressed, except in very general terms. For this is accomplished "in the serene night" of dark contemplation or mystical theology of the "secret and hidden wisdom of God wherein without noise of words and without the service and aid of any bodily or spiritual sense, God teaches the soul after a most hidden and secret manner, without her knowing how; this is that which some spiritual men call "understanding yet understanding not." For this is not done by the active intellect, as the philosophers call it, which works in forms and phantasies and apprehensions of things; but in the intellect inasmuch as it is possible and passive, when, without receiving such forms, it passively receives substantial knowledge" (*S.C.* xxxviii, 9). St. John gives beautiful expositions of the nature and of the blessings which accompany these revelations of Himself in *The Spiritual Canticle* (stanzas xiii and xiv, 4, 12-21, 25), and *The Living*

Flame (ii, 16-20 ; iii, 31-33), any abbreviation of which would give so imperfect a conception that the reader must go to them himself.

These spiritual apprehensions and the feelings they evoke are not to be disregarded and treated as those already spoken of, for they are consequences of that union with God to attain which all others are but remote means, the fruition of spiritual life so far as it is possible in this world.

A very different and lower kind of knowledge is that of the truth of things in themselves, and of events in the world, to which belong the spirit of prophecy and the discernment of spirits. Of the first St. John writes in terms which will sound to those who regard both mediæval and sixteenth-century theologians as unscientific, narrow and obscurantist, astonishingly "modern" and "broad-minded." Quoting the book of Wisdom (vii, 17-21) in which the writer says, "God hath given me true knowledge of the things that are . . ." which he refers to the general type of natural knowledge given to Solomon, he extends the meaning to all particular kinds of knowledge which God may convey by supernatural means. This general kind of knowledge God "gives freely to whom He will, whether naturally or supernaturally ; naturally, as to Balaam, to other idolatrous prophets and to many sybils, to whom He gave the spirit of prophecy ; and supernaturally, as to the holy prophets, apostles and other saints." The "modernity" of this consists in the recognition that natural, scientific knowledge is not simply based on observation by the senses and processes of reasoning, but, as Planck points out, there is "an irrational or mystic element which adheres to physical science as to every other branch of human knowledge." This irrational or mystic element is an intellectual intuition which attains to the inner "form" of things-in-themselves, and greatly aids the work of the analytic reason. It is also noticeable in the Saint's attribution to God of the powers possessed by the prophets and sybils of non-Christian religions, a truth long denied or obscured, which is now, as in Otto Karrer's *Religions of Mankind*, once more explicitly recognized. Not,

indeed, that this is a discovery of modern times, for despite the fact that from the earliest days of Christianity there have been those, both within and without the Church, who have denied the existence of any revelation of God to the pagan world, the Church, on the contrary, has followed the wider view of St. Paul that God never left Himself without witness in the world, a view supported by such early Christian writers as he who referred to Plato as "Moses talking Attic Greek," or St. Justin Martyr, who says that the Gentile world was echoing the scattered syllables of the one Word of God who was to come.

But beyond such "habits and graces freely bestowed," there are particular things made known to those who are progressing toward or are in the state of perfection of union whose spirits, being purged and enlightened, are especially capable of receiving such knowledge, as well as, be it noted, possessing a greater facility in learning by natural means that which is in the hearts of men. Here, again, may be seen the Saint's insistence upon the fact that "grace perfects nature." Yet much humility and caution is necessary in these matters, since the devil is active therein, and "suggestion has great power over the soul" (another "modern" touch). He may represent to a soul, under the pretext of zeal, the sins of others, hoping that the soul may spread abroad such revelations, as often happens, which results in further sin, infamy and discouragement. The descriptions and denunciations of sins to which many preachers have been given in all ages, effects little, if any good, and frequently does much harm. All such things, then, should be rejected by the soul (*S.C.* xxvi, xxvii).

Supernatural locutions may be reduced to three kinds :

1. Successive, which consist of words and arguments which come into the mind when one is meditating and reflecting upon some matter, and by such reasoning arrives at truths and conclusions before unknown, so that it often seems that one is being taught and spoken to by another person. And this may indeed, be true, for the Holy Spirit often aids our reasoning, enabling the formation of true

conceptions of spiritual things. For the mind easily forms inward words, which seem as if they were those of another, in which truths communicated by God are translated into such words. But deception in this is easy, not only because it is frequently nothing more than that one is talking to oneself, and falsely imagines this to be the voice of God, a not at all uncommon thing in our day no less than in St. John's, but also because when the soul, having perceived some truth in the intellect, begins to clothe it in reasoned forms and words, the latter are always inadequate and imperfect and frequently false and heretical. Therefore they must not be attended to or trusted in. And if it is asked, why this is so when it is the Holy Spirit who illumines the intellect in this way, "I say that the Holy Spirit illumines the intellect which is recollected, and according to the manner of its recollection, and that the intellect cannot find any other or greater recollection than in faith." Here, of course, is a reference to the scholastic dictum that "Everything which is received is received after the manner of the recipient," that is, according to the nature, capacity and condition of the one who receives. "We must therefore not apply the intellect (after its manner of reasoning and imagining) to that which is being supernaturally communicated to it, but simply and sincerely apply the will in love to God, for it is through love that these blessings are communicated and through love they will be given in greater measure than before."

The Saint says that it is exceedingly difficult to know whether such locutions come from God, from self or from the devil, so that only a few general indications can be given. If they are of God the soul will be moved to humility, reverence, love, and inclined to serve God more faithfully outside of its prayer-time. The last, it should be added, is the real test of a "good" prayer. Those that are of the devil are more difficult to discern. Since whilst as a rule they lead to vanity and self-esteem this is often by way of a specious humility and an affection rooted in self-love, together with a great attachment to such locutions in which

the soul becomes more occupied in them than in the solid practice of virtue (S.C. xxix).

2. Formal words are those which are actually spoken interiorly by a third person, the soul recognizing that it is not speaking to itself. These, unlike the former, may occur in or out of recollection, being quite independent of the person to whom they are addressed, and since the source from which they come cannot easily be detected by their effects "for at times words which come from the devil have more effect upon imperfect souls than those which come from a good spirit have upon souls which are spiritual," no account must be made of them or time spent upon them (*ibid.* xxx).

3. Substantial words are differentiated from the above in that they produce a substantial, actual effect in the soul, impressing upon it that which is said, so that if our Lord said formally to the soul, "Be thou good," it would be substantially good, or if He said, "Love thou Me," it would both possess and experience the substance of love for Him. For the word of God so spoken is a creative word which does what it says, as when God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

The soul should neither desire nor reject such words but observe what St. Ignatius of Loyola calls "indifference" with regard to them. Let it be, says St. John, "humble and resigned with respect to them" (*ibid.* xxxi).

There remains the last kind of intellectual apprehensions which are called spiritual feelings and are of two kinds, the first of which is in the affection of the will, the second, in the substance of the soul. They are effects of touches of God, some of which are distinct and momentary, others are less distinct and endure longer. Good works and meditations prepare the soul to receive them, but they are no wise dependent upon these, but solely upon God who gives them as and for what reason He wills. The treatment of them, since they are of the will, not of the intellect, rightly belongs to the next book, but they are mentioned here because both kinds usually flow over into the intellect, giving a wondrous knowledge of God which it is impossible to describe. But as such

knowledge is received by the intellect passively, it must not begin to apply its reasoning to it, but simply remain in a receptive attitude which must also be that of the whole soul (S.C. xxxii).

The foregoing brief review of these chapters of *The Ascent* does but scant justice to the Saint's valuable and illuminating treatment of each of the subjects involved, which requires careful study to be appreciated at its proper worth. Two criticisms which have been made of it deserve a reply. The first is that much of what the Saint says about visions and revelations hardly applies to the present day, even though it may have done so in the sixteenth century when the lives of the Saints, as well as those of the Illuminists, were full of such things. But, on the contrary, even a slight knowledge of the nature and number of the sects and cults which have arisen during the last four hundred years, and which rather increase than diminish in our day, will serve to show that St. John's sane teaching is no less needed now than in his time. For, in at least a majority of the founders of such sects, we find that belief in and importance attached to visions and revelations imparted to individuals forms the basis of the most astonishing, irrational and frequently immoral doctrines and practices. The record is continuous from such sixteenth-century examples as Hoffman and Stifel who believed that they had received visions from which they foretold that the world would come to an end at eight in the morning of October 3, 1533 ; Hans Niclas who announced, like " Brother Prince " of the Agapemone in the nineteenth century, that the Holy Ghost now ruled in and through him ; and the Anabaptist " nudists," down to the Muckers of East Prussia, the Perfectionist Bundlers and numerous other American sects each " guided " from on high, Spiritualists, Theosophists, Christian Scientists, Anthroposophovists, Four Square Gospelites—their name is legion, all exhibiting the very characteristics against which St. John never ceased to warn his readers. All are chiefly to be condemned and avoided for their denial of the two central points of his teaching, the necessity of seeking God alone, and the absolute

and final character of the revelation made by God in His Word, our Lord. He has answered the very claims made by them that the visions, etc., upon which they rely actually occurred. Even, he says, if they came from God (which considering their character and consequences seems very unlikely), nothing is easier than that they should have been misinterpreted. Even if, as their disciples say, a great peace and sensible consolation is experienced, not to speak of all kinds of temporal favours received, these things are no real evidence of the operation of God. His keen psychological insight pierces through the sentimental nonsense in which so many souls delight to-day, the almost infinite capacity we have for deceiving ourselves and being deceived, the facility with which we grasp at shadows and miss the substance of spiritual realities.

We shall do well to recall the fact, also, that whilst St. John's teaching does meet so many of the errors and delusions which exist outside the Church, he is writing to and for Catholics, many of whom would benefit by a dose, even if watered down a little, of his astringent medicine by which he desires to free souls from their childish ways and low conceptions, and to raise them to a more truly spiritual life, in which more attention is given to the Divine realities themselves and to the proximate means of attaining to them than to those lower and remote means which are but the first rungs in the ladder of Christian life and progress.

Some readers of St. John may regard his frequent allusions to the activity of the devil, also common in the Bible, as out of date in the enlightened (!) age in which we live. But whilst it is true that it is possible to make too much of the devil and to attribute to him what is actually our own fault, we shall do well to remember that, as it has been said, to deny or ignore his existence is to be compelled to think of human nature in a lower sense, and indeed, in a different sense to that which the Church has ever done. We shall be driven to conceive of it as inherently evil and vicious rather than with the Church, as good but weak and frail, a good thing gone wrong, but not irredeemably so, a good thing en-

dowed with immense capacities and desires which, however, it is naturally insufficient to attain and fulfil. It is no easily dismissed fact that an age-long tradition, Pagan, Jewish and Christian, has taught that man was created for some higher end than appears in the world about him, in a word, to see God, and no less, that men have ever recognized the existence of some malignant power outside of themselves and the material universe which dogs and hampers them in a way which can only be attributed to a subtle and invisible enemy who, being of a spiritual nature, possesses advantages which he uses to the full. This tradition, far from being rendered obsolete by modern knowledge and conditions, is rather intensified. One must have a low estimate of human nature to make it the *fons et origo* of all the evils which exist and threaten the religion, culture and civilization of the modern world.

Many may think, too, that St. John, very differently from St. Teresa, who is so wrapped up in these things, is too severe in his judgments upon visions, revelations and the like, as also in what he says about images, shrines, pilgrimages, etc., in *The Ascent*. For, obviously, the Church has approved of many visions and revelations as of those pious practices which the Saint seems at times to condemn outright.

The first thing to be said in reply is that, even in canonizing and elevating a Saint to the rank of a Doctor of the Church, the Church only gives a general approbation to the particular Saint's writings; she does not regard them as either final or infallible, any more than are those of a Pope, except when, as in the case of the *Tome* of St. Leo, they take a formal *ex cathedra* position. The approbation of the Church implies that there is nothing heretical or worthy of censure in the teaching concerned. Further, the teaching of any spiritual writer will, and must be, coloured and more or less determined both by his own experience and by the purpose for which he writes. Now in St. John both are, to a larger extent than in many other cases, of a singular and unique character. His works derive from and are expositions of the poems in which he records his own spiritual experiences

in the prison at Toledo. His purpose in writing has been stated, and limits the scope of his work, since he has in mind the comparatively few who are raised to the mystic union. Thus, as Fray Basilio de León, in his reply to the objections to St. John's teaching, says, "the doctrine of this book is Catholic, good and profitable for those whom God leads by this road, and according to this type of prayer; these are not numerous, but few and perfect. . . . In the field of virtue there is not one road alone, but many, and God leads some persons by one and some by another." And in regard to what St. John says about the use of images, "He merely says that images are not necessary to the contemplative for his practice of contemplation, although he expressly admits them for this purpose (cf. *A. III*, xxxv, 5), but says that, at the time of contemplation, the affections are already enkindled, and then images are of no use to him since he has truth itself." This *Responsio* of Fray Basilio, which saved the Saint's works from condemnation by the Inquisition, throws much light upon his doctrine, and Professor Peers deserves our thanks for having given the first English translation of so valuable a document in the third volume of his edition of St. John's works.

That there was any real conflict between the mind of St. John and St. Teresa upon these points is unthinkable, although the great difference in temperament must be taken into account, and the fact that as a life-long confessor and director of nuns, St. John knew even more about the spiritual life than did St. Teresa, who also, as she tells us, suffered for years from both a frequent change of directors and bad direction, and at one time was very much influenced by the *Third Alphabet* of Fray Francisco de Osuna, some of the teaching of which St. John seems, at least, to intend to refute directly in *The Ascent*. And if St. John is severe on the childishness of many souls, it is St. Teresa who cries, "Lord, save us from silly devotions."

SO much of St. John's teaching in the third book of *The Ascent*, which is concerned with the active purgation and detachment of the memory and will by the exercise of the virtues of hope and charity, but recapitulates what has already been said with regard to the intellect that, as he says, it can be given more briefly, especially as if the spiritual person instruct his intellect in faith according to the doctrine already given, he will do likewise with the other two faculties, for the operation of each depend upon the others.

The nature and operation of the memory has already been described in chap. vii, pages 127-131, as also we have seen how the Saint answers the objection that his teaching would seem to destroy rather than to perfect nature. On the contrary, he insists that it is designed to release the faculties from their "natural methods and limitations," and expressly says that the voiding of the memory from all the knowledge stored up in it applies to the use of such natural knowledge and means in supernatural matters. "Everything of the natural, if one desires to use it in the supernatural, is a hindrance rather than a help" (A. III, ii, 14). For instance, a student or professor of some science who is endeavouring to walk by faith in the way of the Spirit, is not meant to deliberately set himself to forget and cast out the knowledge which he has accumulated any more than St. John himself emptied his memory of the philosophical knowledge he had gained at Salamanca and so constantly uses in his writings. The Saint states this expressly. The soul "must neither think of these things nor consider them beyond the degree which is necessary for the understanding and performing of its obligations, if it have any concern with these. And this it must do without setting any affection or inclination upon them, so that they may produce no effects in the soul. Thus a man must not fail to think and recall that which he ought

to know and do, for, provided he preserves no affection or attachments, this will do him no harm" (A. III, xv, 1). But when he comes to God in his prayer of contemplation, then he is to empty himself completely, for all natural knowledge and means, however helpful up to this point, are now hindrances to union with God. It is also true, of course, that there are a great many things with which the senses come in contact which anyone who wishes to advance in holiness will take care not to store up in his memory, and will be vigilant to cast out such images of things as are hindering or useless to him. And the more this is habitually done, so that the memory is kept clear of disturbing images and recollections, the more a man is free to attend to and fulfil both his ordinary business and all that directly pertains to his spiritual life. Moreover, St. John teaches that the greater the purity of the soul the more it is enlightened, not only with regard to supernatural but to natural things (A. II, xxiv, 1, 5). With these passages already quoted we may compare those in *The Spiritual Cantic* and *The Living Flame*, in the first of which, speaking of the soul's knowledge of creatures, somewhat according to the sense and affection of contemplation, "in the living contemplation and knowledge of creatures, the soul is caused to see with great clearness how there is in them such abundance of graces and virtues and beauty wherewith God has endowed them, that it seems to her that they are all clothed with wondrous natural beauty derived from and communicated by that infinite supernatural beauty of the image of God whose beholding of them clothes the world with beauty and gladness" (S.C. v, 5). "In that knowledge of Divine light the soul is enabled to see a marvellous harmony and disposition of the Divine Wisdom in the diversity of all the creatures and other works, all and each of which are endowed with a certain resemblance to God, by which each one after its own manner witnesses to that which God is in it" (*ibid.* xiii, xiv, 25). And of that awakening of God in the substance of the soul in the most perfect union possible in this life, not only are there inexpressible revelations of the Divine Life itself

but "all the virtues, substances, perfections and graces of all created things shine forth," for now the soul both perceives the distinctness of all creatures from the Being of God and how yet they are all in Him, so that "it understands them more perfectly in His Being than in themselves" (*L.F.* iv, 4, 5).

St. John, vividly impressed with such words of our Lord as "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"; "If thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light"; "Whosoever forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be My disciple," this last of which he sees as implying much more than an external detachment from possessions, demands that the spiritual man shall actively avoid storing up in the memory the images of things perceived by the senses, and, for all the purposes of the supernatural life, strive to forget and make no use of "natural knowledge and reflections of the memory in order to journey towards God, or for any other purpose." It is clear, as we have shown, that by "any other purpose," he means, anything which has directly to do with this journeying. For even in the highest stages of the spiritual life, such remote means as reading Holy Scripture and the study of Divine things, *outside of prayer*, are not to be excluded. By such discipline and detachment of the memory many evils are avoided, and great good obtained. The purity and silence of the soul before God is of much greater profit than the reflections and reasonings, affections and desires, hopes and fears, which arise when the soul allows itself to dwell upon the things of the past, present or future which the memory and imagination delight in, and which are the cause of so much distraction, and a way by which the devil finds an easy entrance into the soul. We can only "attend to one thing at a time," so that if we are occupied with things which can be apprehended and are known in the memory, we cannot attend to God, to whom we must go by the way of unknowing. And it is not so much by active endeavour to rid oneself of the things of the memory, although this has its place, as by actively paying attention to God that we attain to this oblivion of memory, which, in

itself, is a much less good than our attention to God (A. III, iv, 2 ; v, 3). Nothing is more necessary to the spiritual life, as St. François de Sales repeats, than tranquillity and peace of mind, for these, together with purity of conscience, prepare the soul for the reception of "Divine and human wisdom, and for the virtues," free it from many suggestions of the devil, and open it to the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit (*ibid.* vi). On the other hand, reflections and reasonings upon supernatural things, the images and ideas of which are at times vividly impressed upon the soul, or in the memory or phantasy, occasion many evils. For, in the first place, we cannot completely understand nor form a perfect judgment of natural things which the imagination pictures, and are easily deceived since we have but a partial view of them and so form erroneous or inadequate judgments about them. The history of scientific research in modern times sufficiently illustrates this fact, the positivism of the early nineteenth century has given way to the provisional and cautiously guarded judgments of to-day, and in many cases, to an almost complete but unwarranted scepticism and agnosticism. "All that we know is that we do not know what we think we know."

What, then, is true about our natural knowledge and judgments is much more true with regard to supernatural knowledge, the truth of which, reflected in the mind, is frequently distorted by one cause or another, so that wrong and inadequate judgments are formed concerning it. Neither theological nor moral errors have arisen from men's reflecting upon false and evil things, but are the consequence of wrong thinking and judgments upon true and good things. "The spiritual man will do well not to risk falling into this evil of being deceived in his judgment, by not desiring to apply it in order to know that which he may possess or experience in himself, or what this or that vision, idea or feeling may mean ; neither desire to know it nor give attention to it ; but only to mention it to his spiritual father, who will teach him to empty his memory of these apprehensions" (*ibid.* viii). This advice may be extended to, as the Saint implies in the

words, "not desiring to know that which he may possess or experience in himself," to all desire to know and see our state and progress in the spiritual life, which is as impossible as is such knowledge of our physical state and growth, except, perhaps, to some degree, as we look back over long periods of time. Any preoccupation with self is dangerous, and the more it engages the attention with the false idea that this is the way to get rid of self, the more it defeats the object aimed at. This does not mean that necessary self-examination and the various ascetic means of overcoming self are to be neglected, but that none of these things accomplish much real good, as experience shows, unless they are prompted, not by a subtle desire for self-improvement, but by the desire for God. "He that seeketh to save his soul shall lose it." We do not save our souls by becoming engrossed in them, but as St. Ignatius of Loyola says, by praising, reverencing and serving God.

Attention to any supernatural communications which God may make to the soul also easily results in vanity and presumption, even when it confesses its unworthiness and thanks God for them, so subtle is the capacity we possess of deceiving ourselves, like the Pharisee in the parable, whom we are often more like in spirit than we imagine. We need to remember two things, first, that virtue has nothing to do with any feelings or notions concerning God, but in "a great humility and contempt of oneself and of all that pertains to oneself"; and secondly, that "all visions, revelations and feelings coming from heaven, and any reflections concerning them, are of less value than the least act of humility, which has the effects of charity" (A. III, ix).

Other evils which result from attention to these things are that thereby we give place to the devil (*ibid.* x), and are led to form low and inadequate thoughts about the Being of God Himself, a very common thing even in spiritual persons, a great number of whose difficulties and troubles come of wrong ideas about God. For although it may be known that God is not in any way like creatures or the mental pictures we form of Him, yet unless the memory be

emptied of all such conceptions, there is the danger that in prayer the attention is given to a picture or idea of God instead of to God Himself in His incomparable incomprehensiveness (A. III, x, xi, xii).

Chap. xvi of this third book brings us to the subject of the active purgation of the will, without which that of the intellect and memory would be useless, since unless the will be purged and perfected by charity, faith, as St. James says, is dead and the commandment runs, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength" (Deut. vi, 5). Now "the strength of the soul consists in its faculties, passions and desires, all of which are governed by the will. When, therefore, these faculties, passions and desires are directed by the will towards God, and turned away from all that is not God, then the strength of the soul is guarded for God, and so comes to love God with all its strength. In order that this may be so, we shall here treat of the purgation of the will from all its inordinate affections, whence arise disordered desires, passions and operations, and also the cause of the souls not guarding all its strength for God." These passions are joy, hope, grief and fear which ought to be controlled by reason, in the order of God, so that the soul only rejoices in that which concerns the honour and glory of God, hopes for naught else, neither grieves save for that which has to do with this, nor fears anything save God alone. Each one of these passions requires separate treatment, but it should be noted that, since they are so closely united as acts of the one soul, the ordering of one by reason will affect the others to the same degree.

It is of the highest importance to recognize that St. John teaches that these passions, together with love, are not merely or chiefly physical emotions, but essentially activities of the will, and so within our power. The question is often asked: How can we be commanded to love God? and if love were merely a movement of the lower sensible part of our nature, *amor*, the love of natural affection or sensible desire, then the answer would be: We cannot be. But if,

as is the case, love is a choice, a preference exercised by the will, *diligo*, then we can be commanded to make choice of, to prefer God above all things. So with regard to the passions of joy, hope, grief and fear, they can and ought to be controlled and directed by the will of which they are activities.

Joy is actively aroused in the soul by some object which is seen as desirable and satisfying. There is also a passive joy, in which the effect of joy is experienced without the soul knowing or understanding clearly what causes it. Active and voluntary joy may arise from six good things, namely: temporal, natural, sensible, moral, supernatural and spiritual, which will be dealt with in order, and in the light of one fundamental truth, that is, "the will ought not to rejoice save only in that which is to the honour and glory of God; and that the greatest honour we can give to Him is by serving Him according to evangelical perfection; anything outside of this is of no profit or value to man" (A. III, xvii).

Under the head of temporal goods and blessings come riches, rank, office and other things men desire, as marriage, children, relatives, etc. Now it is true that temporal goods do not necessarily of themselves cause sin, but through the frailty of our nature, men cling to them and so fail God, which is sinful. Our Lord's teaching about riches and possessions more than justifies St. John's statement that they increase the occasion and danger of forgetting God, and that all rejoicing in them is vain "unless they help a man to serve God." Prosperity (one of the things men's eyes are so fixed upon to-day) should be more an occasion of mistrust than rejoicing, and marriage a danger, unless they who enter into it see clearly that God desires them to serve Him better in this state. The evils which result from rejoicing in temporal goods are the blinding of the mind and judgment with regard to God, drifting away from the love for and practice of religion, lukewarmness and carelessness arising from a growing absorption in temporal blessing, which easily leads to mortal sin through covetousness, in which the will is set upon that

which is not God. Thus, contrary to reason, spiritual things are ranked lower than temporal ones, as when men serve money as their god, even going so far that "if they see this god of theirs falling into decay, they abandon themselves to despair and commit suicide for wretched ends," or live in anxiety and misery, "continually paying the tribute of their heart to money by so desiring it" (A. III, xix).

It is not uncommon to see, also, how this love of temporal goods penetrates into and corrodes, as our Lord says, the hearts of many practising Christians, whose minds and prayers are full of desires and petitions for such things rather than set on God's glory and the graces which would enable them to render it to Him. The popular Christianity of to-day is almost entirely centred on temporal blessings, to the ignoring of our Lord's words in the Sermon on the Mount; the materialistic ideals of the Marxist philosophy are found disguised in pious terms in the practice of professing Christian people.

The Christian must guard against the beginnings of such evils, lest he falls little by little away from God, for "great evils are inherent in small sins." Indeed, it is true that a man may well avoid setting his will upon temporal goods, apart from consideration of God, since this results in freedom from all kinds of misery, anxiety and trouble. By so doing he will acquire the virtue of liberality, one of the principal attributes of God, together with liberty of spirit, clarity of reason, rest, peace, confidence in God, and that true reverence and worship of God which is of the will. Further, "he will gain greater joy and recreation in creatures through his detachment from them, for he cannot really rejoice in them so long as he is attached to them, regarding them as his own. For attachment is an anxiety which, like a bond, ties the spirit to earth and allows no greatness of heart. He will acquire, too, by this detachment from things, a clear understanding of them, so that he can discern the truth, natural and spiritual, about them." He enjoys them in a different and higher manner than the man who is attached to and entangled in them. "For, while he enjoys them according

to their true nature, the other enjoys them according to their deceptiveness ; the one sees the best, the other the worst in them ; the one discerning the substance, the other, who regards them only by sense, only seeing the accident. For sense cannot grasp or attain to more than the accident (the external and visible), but the spirit, purged of the clouds and species of the accident, penetrates to the truth and value of things, for this is its object " (A. III, xx).

This so sane and rational statement commands assent. Things can neither be seen nor used aright so long as we are immersed in and subject to them. Broad, clear, comprehensive views of things are only possible in the degree that we get away from and above them, since only so are they seen as they are and in their rightful place in both the natural and supernatural order. The more attention is given to the particular, the less is the universal recognized, and the particular assumes an importance which blinds the mind to that of other things in comparison with which it is relatively of little worth. The tendency of modern science to narrow individual attention to one single branch of a subject too often results in the whole being judged by one of its parts, and in an atrophying of the mind in relation to things outside the particular study in which it is occupied. As regards the Christian life the detachment which St. John requires, which, as we have seen, is not from the possession of, but the setting of the will and desire upon things, is absolutely necessary. No other practice can take its place ; to attempt, for instance, a life of worship and prayer apart from such detachment is merely to deceive oneself.

By natural blessings St. John means such things as beauty, grace, bodily endowments, intelligence, discretion, everything, in short, which pertains to the perfection of human nature, all of which must be seen as gifts of God to be used in His service. The more one has of such gifts the more care is needed lest they should lead to vanity, presumption and distraction from God, "who is in Himself all these beauties and graces in the most eminent degree," and in whom they may be rejoiced in without danger, but rather

to the soul's good. Of the many evils which come from setting the will upon and rejoicing in these goods, the Saint enumerates vainglory, presumption, pride and disesteem of one's neighbour; complacency, sensual delight and luxuriousness; empty praise and adulation; a blunting of the reason and spiritual appreciation; from which comes lukewarmness in regard to the things of God, the loss of purity of spirit "which is inevitably lost first of all. For if anything spiritual remains, it will be very gross and of a sensible nature, scarcely spiritual, interior or recollected at all, consisting more in sensible taste than in strength of spirit" (*A. III*, xxii). On the other hand, to detach the will from rejoicing in natural goods, enables the soul "to love them all rationally and spiritually, as God wills them to be loved. For it must be known that no one deserves to be loved, save for the virtue which he possesses. And to love in this way is to love as God does, and with great liberty; and if this is with attachment, it is with greater attachment to God." Persons and things may and ought to be loved for the reason that God loves all things, and in the same way, that is, not for His own sake but for their good. For as God "loves naught apart from Himself, so He loves nothing in a lower way than He loves Himself, for He loves all things in relation to Himself and love is the final reason of all" (*S.C.* xxiii, 5).

Again and again the careful reader will note how false is the commonly imagined and often-drawn picture of St. John, and how completely mistaken is the view taken of him by many of his critics, as, for instance, by Mr. More in his imperfect and misleading account of his teaching. With all the Saints, St. John had an immense love for persons and things, because he so loved God that he saw them all enwrapped in His goodness and beauty, and thus deserving of a love which, unlike that of earth, does not turn things to itself, and in so doing, spoils and degrades both them and itself (*A. III*, xxiii).

The good things of the senses embrace everything that can be apprehended by the exterior and interior senses, and

that the will ought not to rejoice in any such goods comes of the fact, already sufficiently explained, that the lower senses are not, and cannot be, capable of knowing God as He is. But St. John carefully points out that there is a great difference between "setting the will upon any such things," and "as soon as it finds pleasure in that which it sees and hears and does, it raises itself up to rejoice in God by the aid of this motive and strength for this is very good," since when this is the case these pleasurable emotions need not be shunned, for they help devotion and prayer. Of course, caution must be observed in this matter, and the Saint proposes a test by which we may distinguish between using such pleasures for ourselves, under the pretext of prayer, and actually using them for "the end for which God created and gave them, which is that He should be better known and loved through them." If whenever one hears, sees, tastes or in any sensible way apprehends pleasant and delightful things, the mind and will are at once centred on God, finding in Him more delight than in the emotion of sense which raises him to God, he is profiting by it and it becomes a means of aiding the spirit toward God. I think that St. John would agree that this instant turning to God need not and might not always be clearly recognized as such, begun in deliberate acts of not resting in the pleasure itself, it would become an instinctive habit of will, itself scarcely noticed, except at times. Liberty of spirit, with which these chapters are much concerned, would hardly flourish in one who was constantly asking himself, "Am I now delighting in God or chiefly in this pleasure?" What we are to learn in this active night is how to train ourselves in order to attain to the "glorious liberty of the children of God." St. John is here underlining, for those who "desire to pass to the detachment of the spirit," and the perfection of union with God, the ordinary ascetic teaching concerning the right use of creatures (A. III, xxiv). In fact, he concludes this particular section by saying: "I infer from what has been said, that *until* a man has so accustomed his senses to the purgation of sensible joy, that from the first motion he attains

to the profit of which I have spoken, so that things direct him immediately to God, he must deny himself joy and delight arising from them, in order that he may withdraw his soul from the life of sense " (A. III, xxvi, 7).

Failing in such detachment many evils will ensue, such as vanity of spirit, distraction of mind, covetousness, immodesty, impurity of thought and envy. From joy in hearing useless things arise distractions, gossiping, rash judgments and vacillating thoughts. From joy in sweet perfumes comes loathing of the poor, dislike of serving others, distaste of humble things and spiritual insensibility to greater or less degree. From joy in the pleasure of eating and drinking (St. John does not fall into the error of confining possible sin to drinking), gluttony and drunkenness, anger, discord, lack of charity to one's neighbours and the poor, bodily ailments, spiritual torpor, the corruption of desire for spiritual things, and general discontent.

From joy in the touch of soft things arise many other and more pernicious evils, which are destructive of all spiritual strength and vigour ; the " abominable vice of effeminacy," predisposition of the senses to sin, vain gladness in the heart, licence in the tongue, unrestrained wandering of the eyes, with a general deadening of the other senses. The judgment is blinded by spiritual foolishness, moral cowardice and instability increase, unreasonable fear and confusion affects the conscience, the reason is enfeebled so that it can neither receive nor give good advice, and becomes as useless as a broken vessel, not to speak of a slackness in spiritual exercises, bodily penance, and lukewarmness with lack of devotion in the use of the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. Against all this is to be measured the spiritual and temporal benefits which are the fruit of self-denial in joying in the things of sense. The gaining of recollection, the preservation and increase of the virtues, the ascent of the soul from the sensible to the spiritual, from the animal to the rational, the growing capacity to receive spiritual joy, as all things, Divine and human, are seen in God. For to the pure all things are pure, and occasions of greater good and purity

of heart, so that he who overcomes the joy of desire enjoys the serenity of habitual rejoicing in God through His creatures and works (*A. III, xxv, xxvi*).

By moral good is to be understood the virtues and the practice of them, together with that of the works of mercy, the keeping of the law of God and of the State, and the putting into practice of good intentions and inclinations. We are here on different and higher ground than heretofore, since "these virtues deserve to be loved and esteemed, humanly speaking, for their own sake, so that a man may well rejoice in the possession of them, and exercise them for that which they are in themselves and for the human and temporal good they bring to men." In this way wise men of old praised and practised them, and, although they were heathen, they not only received temporal benefits by means of them, but, "beyond this, God, who loves all that is good (even in barbarians and heathen) and, as says the Wise Man, hinders naught that is good (*Wis. vii, 22*), gave them increased life, honour, dominion and peace as He did to the Romans, because they followed just laws." Yet although this be true, the Christian must not stop at the first stage (as did the heathen, their spiritual sight not going beyond this life); but since he has the light of faith by which he hopes for eternal life, he must rejoice principally and solely in the fact that by doing these things for the love of God he will gain eternal life. Let him understand that the value of his good works, of whatever kind they may be, depends not on the quantity or quality of them but upon the love of God which prompts them, and that the less there is in them of self interest, joy, pleasure, consolation and praise, either with respect to this world or the next, the more pleasing they are to God and of merit to the soul.

It is not low but high things which are most dangerous to us, so that the evils which befall him who rejoices in his good works and practices are very pernicious because they are spiritual. Pride, vanity, vainglory and presumption, like that of the Pharisee; judgments passed upon others by comparing their actions with our own; the doing of good

works only when some pleasure is found in them, and consequently, as our Lord teaches, losing the true reward of them ; thus, such persons make no progress in perfection because when they find no pleasure in good works and practices, they fail to persevere, deceived by thinking that those which give them pleasure must be better than those in which they find only dryness and lack of consolation ; and a great growth in self-love (*A. III, xxviii*). But he who desires not to set his rejoicing on moral goods is freed from many deceits and temptations of the devil ; performs good works more deliberately and perfectly, being led by reason rather than by passion, and more steadfastly, since the passion of joy encourages the irascible and concupiscible emotions, the former of which resists any object not pleasing to it, the latter desiring that which is so pleasing, or fleeing from that which is painful to it, so that governed by these a man's works are subject to variability and changeableness. Further, a man becomes poor in spirit, meek, humble and prudent in his actions, and is freed from a multitude of spiritual sins and imperfections.

Supernatural goods are held to mean " all the gifts and graces given by God which exceed natural virtue and capacity, and are called *gratis datæ*," such as the wisdom and knowledge given to Solomon and the graces mentioned by St. Paul in the twelfth chapter of first Corinthians. These are to be distinguished from spiritual goods in that they are given for the good of men, whilst spiritual graces have to do with God and the soul alone. Also, they differ in their object, spiritual graces having God for their object, whilst supernatural ones have to do with the creature, so that they differ also in substance and operation.

Two kinds of benefit come from supernatural graces, temporal, such as miracles of healing, prophesying about the future, that men may take heed to themselves, and similar things ; spiritual, in that God is served by those who perform them or by those who receive or witness them. As to the temporal benefit, they deserve little or no rejoicing of the soul, for unless a spiritual good accompanies them

they are scant or of no importance, and may, indeed, be worked by those who are not in a state of grace and charity, as we see in Holy Scripture, and by the words of St. Paul, " Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, etc. " (1 Cor. xiii, 1, 2), and of our Lord Himself (Matt. vii, 22, 23 ; Luke x, 20). Rejoicing, then, in these, produces three principal evils in the soul ; it may deceive and be deceived ; it may fall away from the faith ; or indulge in vainglory and self-esteem. Deception of self or others is easy, since to distinguish between true and false works of this kind, and as to how and when they are to be practised, great counsel and light from God is necessary, and, as has been said, joy blinds the judgment, and also moves a person to do what gives pleasure for unfitting reasons. Thus men are led to make a wrong use of graces given by God, or to pretend to the possession of such things, which opens the door to the devil who encourages such lies and delusions, to the point that some have entered into compacts with him, " hence we have wizards, enchanters, magicians, fortune-tellers and sorcerers." We need not smile somewhat pityingly on this belief of the Saints. Large numbers of people, by no means of the more ignorant classes, who generally have more common sense, frequent the modern soothsayers and fortune-tellers, and will assure one of the extraordinary amount of true things they have been told. In more than one place St. John shows how this may be so and yet be not of God nor of any advantage but rather otherwise to those concerned. It is the same in the case of modern prophets, such as those of the British Israelite delusion and others, their prophecies may come to pass, but this is no infallible sign that they are of God and where, as is common, all the emphasis is laid on mundane matters, world dominion, prosperity and the like, it should be obvious to any Christian that nothing could be further from the teaching and spirit of the New Testament or more injurious to true religion. For how true it is that by these things many fall away from the Faith, some because they see them succeed, others because true religion is discredited by their failure or fatuousness ;

others, as may be in the case of true miracles, because they pay more account to them than to faith, which is independent of all that is visible and sensible. Our Lord's actions and words after His resurrection show the superiority of faith to sight, and we may say that "miracles are never wrought by God save when they are actually necessary to belief" for "it is not according to the nature of God that miracles should be wrought, for, as is said, when He works them, it is because He cannot do otherwise," that is, under the circumstances, in which He condescends to the weakness of human nature, as in the case of the miracles recorded in the New Testament, and those of the saints of which there is little or no doubt (*ibid.* xxxi). But the Christian will always do best in following the example of St. Louis who, being told that a miracle was taking place at Mass, refused to go and witness it, saying that no miracle was needed to assure him of the truth he accepted by faith. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the Church has always leant towards scepticism in the matter of miracles, even though her children have, even in our own time—as witness the immense crowds which flocked to Beauraing in 1932 and to Konnersreuthal—ways shown a great delight in them. Even where more or less approbation has been given to asserted miracles, visions and revelations, it is much more guarded than is commonly assumed, as may be seen in official documents emanating from the Sovereign Pontiff and from the Congregation of Rites. The latter in a decree of May 12, 1877, permitting the setting up of images of our Lady of Lourdes and of La Salette, says, "*Ejusmodi apparitiones seu revelationes neque approbatas, neque reprobata vel damnatas ab Apostolica Sede fuisse, sed tantum permissas tanquam pie credendas fide solum humana.*" And in 1907 Pope Pius X, in the encyclical *Pascendi*, refers to the prudence of the Church in such matters, and says that she does not guarantee the truth of the facts concerned, and that only a human belief in the good faith of the witnesses of such reputed facts is to be given. The doctrine of transubstantiation, again, is not founded upon the alleged miracle at Bolsena nor upon the revelations of

Juliana of Liège ; nor that of the Immaculate Conception upon the occurrences at Lourdes, nor the devotion to the Sacred Heart upon the revelations of St. Margaret Mary, but upon theological grounds which are independent of such things. And they are to be received by faith not because of any similar visions or revelations.

Particular attention, says St. John, must be given to the sixth kind of goods, which are of the spirit, since it is quite common for souls to make use of spiritual things solely according to sense, leaving the spirit empty. It is therefore both astonishing and disconcerting to find that after a full treatment of the first kind of spiritual good, that of the second ends abruptly and the other two are omitted altogether. Nor have we any clue as to whether the remaining chapters were ever written or have been lost, though the total absence of any reference to them by early commentators would lead one to think, with P. Silverio, that for some reason unknown to us, they were not written. Professor Peers, who gives an abridged account of P. Silverio's consideration of the problem, tells us that although he is inclined to agree with him, "I should hold the scales between the two rather more evenly (A. Introd. lvii).

Spiritual goods are of two kinds, the one delightful, the other painful. Both may consist of things which are understood clearly and distinctly, or of things which are dark and confused. We are here only concerned with the former, and with those which are apprehended by and cause joy in the will, which are four : motive, provocative, directive and perfective. The first motivating spiritual goods are images and pictures of saints, oratories and ceremonies, together with articles of devotion, rosaries, crucifixes, etc., practices such as pilgrimages, the keeping of festivals, and so on, concerning which the Saint's trenchant criticism may be summed up in his own words, "Let those know then, that the more trust they place in these things and ceremonies, the less confidence they have in God and will not gain from God what they desire" (*ibid.* xlv).

The last and unfinished chapter of *The Ascent* has to do

with preachers, whose office is to provoke or persuade us to serve God, and with those who hear them, for both must direct the rejoicing of their will to God by means of this exercise. The preacher must realize that his work is more spiritual than oral, that its power rests not in the height of the doctrine, or in the rhetoric or style in which it is expressed but in the spirit of the preacher. The better his life, the greater the fruit which his words produce. True, good style, eloquent language and the like influence when accompanied by true spirituality, without which a sermon may please the senses and mind but does little to affect the will. People who are centred more in their own pleasure than in amendment of life pay attention to the externals rather than to the spirituality contained in and expressed by these, and are often given to praising and running after preachers, rejoicing more in having their sensations tickled or soothed than in learning how to serve God by advancing in holiness. Any discreet preacher knows what most people mean by a "good" sermon! Here ends the Saint's description of the manner and degree in which the soul, desiring union with God in this life, and having subjected the lower part of itself to the higher, actively enters the Dark Night of Sense which is "only the gate and beginning of contemplation . . . serving more to accommodate sense to spirit than to unite the spirit to God" (*D.N.* II, ii, 1). Here it is the higher faculties of intellect, memory and will which have to be trained, denied, disciplined, emptied of their natural manner of working in regard to spiritual things that they may receive a new operation, that of the Spirit of God, by which alone they may be united to God who is Spirit. Now, as St. John repeats, since it is contemplation which produces this Night of Sense, we must endeavour to see what he means by contemplation and what it effects in the life of the soul.

NO teacher of any branch of knowledge in any age is to be regarded as a terminus, a full stop, after which there remains no more to be said. Science does not end with Faraday or Jeans, art with Raphael or Picasso, music with Beethoven or Hindemith, sculpture with Leonardo or Epstein, literature with Shakespeare or Milton, theology and mystic experience with St. Thomas Aquinas or St. John of the Cross. In every case there are, and will ever be, additions, explications, developments, since all these things are not static but dynamic, too great and brimming with life to be exhausted even by those who apprehend and express them more perfectly than do the mass of men. It follows that the achievement of one man or age may attain to a high level, opening up new vistas of truth and beauty, whilst yet he or it is unconscious of some of the implications which lie within his work, implications which only receive definition, description and classification in later times. This has been and is still true with regard, for instance, to the marvellous theological synthesis accomplished by St. Thomas in the thirteenth century which has been the subject of commentaries, notably those of the Salmanticenses and Jean de St. Thomas, Suarez and others in the sixteenth century, and of the Neo-Thomistic school of the present day. No less is it true of the writings of St. John, which, with those of St. Teresa, produced a veritable Carmelite School, in which the names of John of Jesus-Mary (*d.* 1615), Thomas of Jesus (*d.* 1627), Philip of the Holy Trinity (*d.* 1671), and Joseph of the Holy Spirit (*d.* 1736), hold high place. In our own time, the Saint's teaching became a special object of attention to all who were interested in the renewed study of mysticism, Catholic, non-Catholic and unbeliever, whilst both within and without the Carmelite Order, a fierce controversy arose upon various questions, especially with relation to the subject of Contemplation.

Does St. John teach that there is but one species of contemplation, that which he at times calls "infused," which is purely a Divine gift unattainable by any human effort, or does he teach that there is also a contemplation which is the fruit of human effort aided by grace? The solution of this question will, we think, emerge in the course of this study of the Saint's writings, following which some attention may be given to the history of the term "contemplation" both previous to and since St. John's time, which will throw further light upon the subject. But it is of primary importance to note that the controversy did not exist in the Saint's day, nor had been even thought of, so that he must not be conceived of as writing with it in his mind and making a solemn pronouncement upon it. His use of the term, therefore, is not always so clear and defined as will appear in later writers, and this accounts for the fact that protagonists of weight are to be found, though less so than a few years ago, diametrically opposed to each other upon the question.

As the aim of the present writer is to present the Saint's own teaching with as little reference as possible to that of other spiritual writers, an over-abundance of which has at times obscured it, we shall proceed to consider, first, St. John's definition and description of Contemplation; second, his statement of the time at which it is entered upon; third, the successive degrees of contemplation as he describes them; fourth, the effects of contemplation.

I. (1) "Contemplation, by which the intellect has the highest knowledge of God, is called mystical theology, which means secret wisdom of God; for it is secret to the very intellect which receives it. For this reason St. Dionysius calls it a ray of darkness" (A. II, viii, 6). With which we may compare the commentary on the line of *The Spiritual Canticle*,

There he taught me knowledge most delectable.

"The delectable knowledge which she says here that He taught her is mystical theology, the secret knowledge of God which

spiritual men call contemplation ; this is most delectable because it is knowledge through love, which is its master and makes it wholly delectable. And inasmuch as God communicates this knowledge and intelligence to the soul in the love wherewith He communicates Himself to her it is delectable to the intellect, since it is knowledge which pertains to it, and it is also delectable to the will, since it is in love which pertains to the will " (S.C. xviii, 3 ; cf. xxxviii, 6). " Contemplation is a high state, from which in this life God begins to communicate with the soul, and reveals Himself to it, yet not completely " (*ibid.* xii, 9). It is an " act of simple contemplation " (D.N. I, ix, 8), in which the faculties have no active part as in meditation, but " enjoys the knowledge which it has already received in the said faculties, without they themselves doing anything further " (A. II, xiv, 6). This does not mean that they are doing nothing, for " contemplation is a receiving " (L.F. iii, 33), in which " God communicates Himself passively, even as to one who has his eyes open, so that light is communicated to him passively, without his doing more than holding them open. And this receiving of light which is infused supernaturally is to understand passively ; but we say that the soul does not work, not because it does not understand, but because it understands that which it has not gained by its own industry, but only receives that which is given to it, as it comes to pass in the illuminations, enlightenments and inspirations of God " (A. II, xv, 2). The soul " sees " with the eye of the intellect since for the soul " to see is for it to understand " (*ibid.* II, xxiii, 2), that is, not by a process of reasoning but by an " intuition of naked truths bestowed upon the intellect " (*ibid.* II, xxvi, 1) in " contemplation that is given by faith " (*ibid.* II, x, 4), which faith, being a light which transcends all that reason and imagination can think or conceive, blinds and renders useless the natural activity of the faculties (*ibid.* II, iii). It is because contemplation is such an excess of light that at first it appears as obscure darkness, in which the knowledge it gives is general, confused, subtle, pure and simple, spiritual

and interior, that it can neither be perceived nor understood in the sense that knowledge gained by meditation and reasoning can be (*A. II*, xiii, 7; xiv, 8, etc.). Nor are its effects perceived at the time of contemplation, when, indeed, nothing seems to be done, and the soul is in a state of oblivion, unconscious of the passage of time and without any thinking or reflections, being "united in pure intelligence, which belongs not to time," yet the effects of this knowledge, which are the raising of the spirit to the Divine intelligence in abstraction from all thoughts and memories of it, remain in the soul which at the time was unconscious of what was being done in it by God (*ibid.* II, xiv, 11). But the more "the habit of contemplation" (*ibid.* II, xv, 1) "grows, by the soul allowing itself to rest quietly in this state of loving attention to God, the more it will consciously experience that general, loving knowledge of God" (*ibid.* II, xiii, 7). For contemplation "is Divine love and knowledge in one . . . without any mediate or specific acts, although God may at times produce them in the soul for some length of time . . . a loving awareness of God . . . as of one that opens his eyes with the awareness of love" (*L.F.* iii, 33). It is "the road and way of the spirit, which is that of progressives and proficients, which is also called the way of illumination or of infused contemplation, wherewith God Himself feeds and refreshes the soul, without discourse, or the active help of the soul" (*D.N.* I, xiv, 1), "an inflowing of God into the soul, which purges it from its ignorances and imperfections, habitual, natural and spiritual, which contemplatives call infused contemplation or mystical theology, wherein God secretly teaches the soul and instructs it in the perfection of love, without its doing anything or understanding what this infused contemplation is; for as it is the loving wisdom of God, He produces great effects in the soul, purging and illuminating it and disposing it for the union of love with God" (*D.N.* II, v, 1).

With this material, which includes all the Saint's most definite and descriptive statements, although much of his elaboration and illustration of them has been omitted, some

of which will be used later, we can arrive at some preliminary ideas as to what constitutes the essential characteristics of contemplation in the wide sense in which St. John uses the term.

(2) On the part of God, who, it must be remembered, goes before, instigates and enables all the acts of the soul, contemplation is a free gift by which God communicates Himself to the highest part of the soul, in love, wisdom and knowledge, which are one in Him, producing in the soul such effects as He wills at this time or that. All this is independent of any activity of the soul *at the time* in which such contemplation is afforded, and indeed, stops any natural operation of the faculties at such time of prayer. Contemplation is an act of God operating directly and intimately in the soul without any intermediary save those of faith, hope and charity illumined by the Gifts of the Holy Ghost.

(3) On the part of the soul, contemplation consists in receiving the communication made by God, which it makes possible by actively doing that which lies within its power to free itself from everything, whether of the exterior or interior senses and natural operation of the faculties in order that it may remain passive in a quiet, loving attention to God, opposing no work of any kind to His desire and operation, nor desiring to see, know, understand or feel the effect of such operation. In this act the intellect passes beyond the limited and defective exercise of its reasoning to that of its highest capacity, which is that of intuitive contemplation. The content of these two points of view will emerge more fully as we consider the three remaining divisions of our subject.

II. The stage of the spiritual life at which contemplation begins.

The Night of Sense, it will be remembered, has two parts, the first, of the exterior senses, which consists in the active detachment of the soul from the desires of the lower part of the soul, and is described in Book I of *The Ascent*. The second part, called by St. John, the Night of Faith, has to do with both the active and passive detachment of the

higher faculties of the soul from their natural manner of operation, and it is contemplation in its first form which brings the soul into this part of the Night of Sense. For it is here that meditation becomes impossible, aridity succeeds to sensible consolation, and the soul at prayer desires only to be alone with God, waiting upon Him in a loving attention, despite the fact that owing to the contrast of this state with that of meditation, and the general, obscure character of the knowledge conveyed by it, the soul is disquieted by the thought that it is wasting its time because it cannot see clearly what it is doing or receiving. Now, all this is precisely the effect of contemplation, according to St. John: "Meditation and natural reflection by means of which the soul begins to seek God" until "God brings the soul into a more spiritual state, which is contemplation" (A. II, xvii, 7). The first book of *The Dark Night* "treats of the Night of Sense" from the passive side, as the Saint had promised in *The Ascent*, saying that "we have now to prove how this second part, which is faith, is night to the spirit (i.e. to the spiritual faculties), even as the first part is night to sense. We shall then speak of the things which are contrary to it, and how the soul must dispose itself actively to enter into it. For of the passive side, which is that which God works in it, without its own activity, in order to place it in this night, we shall speak in its place" (A. II, ii, 3). This "night of sense is common and comes to many, these are beginners" whom "God desires to raise from and draw out of their low manner of love to a higher grade of love for Him, to free them from the low exercise of sense and discursive meditation, . . . and to place them in the exercise of the spirit in which they can commune with God more abundantly and more free from imperfections." To this end, when they have made progress in virtue, meditation and prayer, and have gained strength, overcoming their desires and finding delight in spiritual exercises, "God obscures all this light of theirs and closes the door and source of the sweet spiritual water they were tasting of . . . leaving them in such darkness that they do not know where to go with their sensible

imagination and meditation ; for they cannot advance one step in meditation, as they used to do, their interior senses being submerged in this dark night, and left in so great a dryness that not only do their former exercises give them no consolation but are full of distaste and bitterness " (*D.N.* I, viii). Yet their " memory is drawn to God with painful care and solicitude " and " the spirit which is receiving its food goes forward in strength . . . although feeling no sweetness at first . . . it experiences strength and energy to act from the substance of this interior food given to it, which food is the beginning of contemplation which is dark and dry to the senses ; which contemplation is secret and hidden from him who experiences it ; and ordinarily, joined with the aridity and emptiness which it causes in the senses, it gives the soul an inclination and desire to be alone and in quietude, without being able to think or desire to think of anything particular . . . in this state of contemplation, which the soul enters when it ceases meditation " (*D.N.* I, ix, 3-8 ; cf. *L.F.* iii, 30).

These formal statements, which receive support on page after page of St. John's writings, suffice to show that, as we have said, it is contemplation which, making meditation normally (there are exceptions) impossible, introduces the soul into the second half of the Night of the Senses, as it later brings it, if God wills, into the Night of Spirit, " for the purgation of sense is merely the gate and entrance of contemplation leading to the purgation of spirit, serving rather to accommodate sense to spirit than to unite spirit with God " (*D.N.* II, ii, 1).

III. In the mind of St. John, then, there is but one species of contemplation, which, however, has degrees and stages which we must now consider.

The progressive character of contemplation is shown in the second chapter of the first book of *The Ascent*, where the Saint speaks of three nights, adding that actually they are three parts of one night, the first comparable to evening, when things begin to fade from sight, which is the first part of the Night of Sense ; the second, to midnight, the second

part the Night of Faith ; by means of which God continually and more fully communicates Himself to the soul "so secretly and intimately, that he becomes another night to the soul, inasmuch as He causes the said communication to be much more obscure than the others, as we shall say later. And when this third night is past, which is the accomplishment of the communication of God in the spirit, which ordinarily comes to pass in great darkness of soul, there follows union with the Bride, which is the Wisdom of God."

In thus regarding contemplation as one, to the heights of which the soul progresses by ordered degrees, St. John is following St. Thomas, who teaches that "There is this difference between a man and an angel, that the angel perceives the truth by a simple intuition, while man only arrives at it by degrees. The contemplative life, then, consists in a unique act, which is its end and perfection, that is, the contemplation of truth, which final act constitutes its unity. But it also has many acts by which it attains to this final act, the consummation of all . . . the sublime contemplation of Divine Truth in which it comes to its final perfection" (S.T. II, II, Q, clxxx, 3, 4). Suarez also put this clearly: "In every degree of contemplation it is necessary to make a distinction between the beginning, all that which is the way, and the end, the union with God by a simple intuition of truth." Regarding contemplation in the Ignatian sense, which is entirely foreign to St. John's use of the term, Suarez makes the beginning consist of prayer and meditation but goes on, "Beyond this stage methods cease ; all consists of a very simple act, accomplished more in receiving than in seeking" (*De Spiritualibus Exercitiis*, edit. Debuchy, p. 103).

St. John frequently speaks of "the beginning" of contemplation, of those whom God "begins to lead" into, or who "enter into it," of its "early stages" when "the habit of contemplation is not yet so perfect" as to entirely dispense with meditation, of those who desire "to progress further in contemplation," of the manner in which the faculties, and finally the spirit, are gradually purged, illuminated by con-

templation and brought into union with God. To contemplate is to see, and, as Aristotle says, and all our experience proves, "The manner of our seeing varies with the state of the soul," the life and so the perception of which is a growing, ever more apprehending one, unless the eye of the soul is centred on too many things or solely upon things which are below and unworthy of its capacity. The whole purpose of the Nights is to free the soul from all that hinders the fullest exercise of its sight, and from all that prevents the operation of God within it. For God deals with His creatures according to their nature, capacity and disposition, respecting that nature which He created, adapting Himself to each one's capacity (*A. II*, xi, 9 ; xvii, 2-5, 7, etc.), waiting upon their desire for Him, "communicating Himself most to that soul which has advanced farthest in love ; namely, whose will is most closely conformed to the Will of God. . . . Thus the more the soul is wrapped up in creatures and its own abilities, by affection and habit, the less it is disposed for that union ; since it does not give God the fullest opportunity to transform it supernaturally " (*A. II*, v, 4). Even as we read of our Lord that "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief" (*Matt.* xiii, 58), and St. John, whilst in one place he says that God alone knows why so few are raised to contemplation, in others gives such reasons as lack of desire, knowledge or courage, the hindrances set up by their indiscretion (discretion is a great virtue in his eyes), and says that it is not God's will that few are so raised to this high spiritual state, for "on the contrary, it would please Him were all so raised, but rather because He finds so few in whom He can accomplish so great and high a work. For when He proves them in small things and finds them weak, and sees that they flee from labour, and desire not to submit to the least discomfort or mortification, or to work with solid patience, finding that they are not strong enough to bear the favour which He was granting them when He began to purge them, He goes no further with their purification, neither does He lift them up from the dust of the earth, since greater fortitude and constancy than

they possess would be required for this" (*L.F.* ii, 23 ; cf. *A.* Prologue, II, xxi, 3).

The view we have taken of the essential unity of contemplation receives further justification in a passage of the twenty-third stanza of the second redaction of *The Spiritual Canticle*, in which, after speaking of the manner in which "the Son of God redeemed human nature and betrothed it to Himself" upon the Cross, the Saint goes on to explain that this is not the betrothal of which he is now speaking, "for that was made once for all when God gives the first grace to the soul, which comes to pass in baptism. But this betrothal is by the way of perfection, *which is accomplished only very gradually and by degrees* ; that although they are both one, the difference is that the one is accomplished at the soul's pace, and so, little by little, while the other is according to God's pace, and thus is accomplished once for all." Now the way of perfection which leads to the spiritual betrothal is none other than that contemplation which begins in the Night of Faith. The same unity is implied in *The Dark Night*, where of the first stanza of the poem which is expounded in both *The Ascent* and *The Dark Night*, he says that a far greater purgation than has yet been experienced is necessary "that this privation may be one of the principles required in the spirit (i.e. spiritual faculties), that there may be introduced and united with it the spiritual form (i.e. the spirit itself) of the spirit, which is the union of love ; all of which the Lord works in the soul by means of a pure and dark contemplation, as the soul makes known in the first stanza. This stanza, although it was intentionally interpreted with reference to the first Night of Sense, is principally to be understood of this second Night of the Spirit, for this is the principal part of the purification of the soul" (II, iii, 3).

Further, although, as we have seen, St. John does not adhere strictly to the traditional interpretation of the Three Ways, especially in insistence upon their successiveness, leaning more to St. Bonaventure's description of them as all three permeating the whole of spiritual progress, it is not surprising to find that so devout a student and follower of

St. Thomas should have been influenced by the Angelic doctor's emphasis upon the fact that what really distinguishes one Way from the other is the quality and intensity, at different stages of the three dominant characteristics of Purification, Illumination and Union (*vide* Appendix). For it is precisely an insistence upon these notes of quality and intensity which marks St. John's description of the progress of the spiritual and contemplative life, and serves to explain the reason that he constantly uses identical language in his descriptions of different degrees in this progress, a fact which is apt to confuse even the careful reader who may not have perceived its significance.

It has been the tendency of spiritual writers, often forgetful of the maxim, *Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*, both before and since the sixteenth century, to multiply degrees and distinctions in their accounts of the spiritual and the contemplative life. Guigues du Pont (*d.* 1297), for instance, distinguishes between speculative, intellectual, affirmative and anagogical contemplation, using the latter term, as was common, in the widest sense, and enumerates twelve supernatural graces, five of which belong to mystic contemplation, by which God draws the soul to Himself. Some seventeenth-century writers betray a similar meticulousness, perhaps the most guilty being Pierre de Poitiers, who makes twenty-one essentially different kinds of the state of mystic repose.

Whilst our main object is to see what St. John himself taught, it would, perhaps, be unfair to omit any reference to the claim of P. Joseph de Jesus-Maria, who entered the Carmelite Order four years after the Saint's death and in his work upon his teaching says that St. John taught that there are "two species of contemplation," or "two ways (*maneras*) of supernatural contemplation; one conceded to our human manner by means of the simple light of faith, and of the ordinary aids of grace; and this we are always able to exercise as we desire, as to do any other act of faith with the same aids; and supernaturally illumined by the gift of Wisdom after our manner. The which light, says St.

Thomas, is not refused to anyone who is in a state of grace, if they know how to dispose themselves to receive it. The other contemplation is more elevated and proceeds from particular and more efficacious helps, and of a greater illumination of the gift of Wisdom, which raises the soul to a knowledge and love of God above our human manner, to which it is impossible for a man to attain save when God concedes it " (*Don que tuvo San Juan de la Cruz para guiar las almas a Dios*, c. x). Actually, only P. Joseph's use of the term "*species*," and his statement that anyone by faith and the ordinary means of grace can arrive at the first contemplation, seem to negative our contention that St. John only speaks of degrees of a contemplation which is always given by God, though it may be called acquired in the sense that the soul by its own efforts, aided by grace, arrives at the place where it may be given, but this according to God's pleasure, who may only give the beginning and a certain degree of it. But St. John never speaks of "*species*," or of a contemplation which is, as it were, at our disposal, and P. Joseph uses the same word for both kinds of contemplation, *concedir*, only distinguishing the means by which it is conceded, to both sets of which he allows a special illumination of the gift of Wisdom, which he quotes St. Thomas as saying is not refused to those "who dispose themselves *to receive* it." For, as St. John insists, "Contemplation is a receiving" and is only given by degrees, "morsels," as the soul makes itself ready for the Divine gift. The view, therefore, adopted in these pages seems to reconcile the two opinions by distinguishing between contemplation viewed as an act of God or as that of man, both of which are necessary. And it is a Carmelite, P. Theodore de San-José, who has written "It is to be remarked that if it is easy to make a *theoretical* distinction between acquired and infused contemplation, *practically*, however, that is to say, in concrete cases, it will often be very difficult, or even impossible; for in actual life, they are not always adequately distinguishable; it is possible for them to be so intermingled that the difference is imperceptible, so Joseph of Jesus-Mary assures us that St. John

of the Cross taught that those who were not able to practise discursive meditation—and who thought they were wasting their time,—that they should be attentive to God during their prayer and desirous to please Him, resting their soul before the Lord in a simple and loving regard of faith. He taught this act of contemplation to simple, innocent and sincere persons and they received *the Divine illumination and its effects although they were not able to perceive them*. Thus where a discernment of an experimental nature is lacking, it will not always be easy for the director of souls to establish, from the circumstances, whether the prayer in any particular case is acquired or infused, which, moreover, is without practical importance.” He concludes by saying that whilst the distinction between acquired and infused contemplation is theoretically clear, experimentally it is not so (*Essai sur l'oraison selon l'école Carmelitaine*, Bruges, 1923). That distinction, we claim, so far as St. John's own words are concerned, is one of point of view and degree, not of kind.

This point of view also receives confirmation in the words of P. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, professor of mystic theology in the International College of Decalced Carmelites in Rome, who in his recent conferences upon the Teresian School and allied problems of mystical theology, reminds us that “it must not be forgotten that St. John of the Cross wrote for contemplatives, for souls born of the Carmelite Reform. . . . It was natural, therefore, that perfection should be presented to them under its contemplative and mystic form, the more so in that the Saint does not seem to consider mystic contemplation as an extraordinary grace in the exact sense of the term.” In the third conference, dealing with the question of acquired contemplation, he says of the habit of contemplation which, in *The Ascent*, St. John calls acquired, “There is not the least doubt: this contemplation is made up of a *mélange* of activity and passivity; it is at once fruit of the efforts of the soul and a gift of God.” He goes on to describe the progressive character of this contemplation of faith, and concludes that “reasons of the speculative order which make legitimate the extension of the

expression 'infused contemplation' to those states which Carmelites term 'acquired,' in no way lead the Carmelite authors to abandon a doctrine of which they have realized the practical importance. If the mystic Doctor, desirous of leading souls toward contemplation, does not hesitate to declare that they 'acquire the habit' of a contemplation of faith aided, moreover, by the assistance of God, who may reproach his disciples for giving it the name acquired."

St. John, despite the careful distinctions he makes with regard to various spiritual apprehensions of the intellect and memory, and the activities of the will, in the second and third books of *The Ascent*, makes but two main divisions of the life of prayer, Meditation and Contemplation, and two only of Contemplation, Initial and Preparative, Progressive and Perfective. The first belongs to the second part of the Night of Sense, and consists in the imparting by God of "light which is supernaturally infused" (*A. II, xv, 2*), a general, confused, indistinct knowledge, the principal purpose of which is the negation of the active use of the faculties in meditation and their detachment from all apprehensions which can be received by the senses or faculties, "the purgation which is effective for sense coming when that of the spirit begins (i.e. in the Night of Faith). Wherefore the night which we have called of sense may be and should be called a certain reformation and bridling of the desire rather than purgation" (*D.N. II, iii, 1*). For the really effective and complete purgation only results from the Night of Spirit, as will be seen.

The second main division belongs to the Night of Spirit in which there is a great intensification and deepening of the quality of infused contemplation, which affects the whole nature of the recipient, for "here God purges the soul according to the substance of its sense and spirit, and according to the interior and exterior faculties . . . for the sensitive part is purified in aridity, the faculties in the emptiness of their apprehensions, and the spirit in obscure darkness" (*D.N. II, vi, 4*). This contemplation is purifying, illuminating and unifying, bringing the reformed and harmonized soul to the

supreme height of the Spiritual Betrothal and Marriage in which the soul enjoys a conscious, intimate and experimental perception of God Himself, as fully as is possible in this life.

Before we go further, we must give some attention to the question, upon which we have already trespassed, of "acquired" and "infused" contemplation. The problem which, as we have said, did not become a matter of controversy until after St. John's death (the term "acquired" applied to contemplation is only to be found once previous to the seventeenth century, in the *De fonte lucis et semitis vitæ* of Denis the Carthusian, named the Ecstatic Doctor (1402-71)), and is first used by the Carmelite Thomas de Jesus in his *De Contemplatione divina* (1620), although the expression "to acquire" contemplation was used by a Benedictine, Antoine de Alvarado in 1608 in his *Arte de bien vivir*. But the thing itself is to be found as far back as St. Clement of Alexandria in the second century and is mentioned repeatedly by spiritual writers down the ages. But whether in the sense of an explicit distinction of *kind* from a higher "infused" contemplation, which distinction is first found in Antoine de Molin  s's *Ejercicios espirituales* which appeared in 1615, is not at all certain, and we do not think that St. John makes such a distinction of kind but only of degree and intensity. There are, then, two questions, first, is there a contemplation which can be acquired by our own efforts aided by the ordinary means of grace, which is *different in kind* from a contemplation which is "infused" by God? Second, does St. John teach such an acquired contemplation? The solution of the problem lies, we believe, in the fact, outlined on page 327, that contemplation can be, and is regarded by spiritual writers, St. John included, from two different points of view, that of God and that of the soul. From the first, contemplation is "infused" from the beginning, from the second, it is "acquired" in the sense that meditation leads up to and prepares the soul to receive the gift of contemplation which God bestows as and when He wills. It cannot be acquired by our own efforts in the sense

that we can pass from meditation to contemplation of our own desire and will ; we can come up to the door but only God can open it. And this, says St. John, He often does, for many persevering souls come into the Night of Sense, although few pass through it into the Night of Spirit (*D.N.* I, viii, 1 ; ix, 9 ; xiv, 5). In other words, the soul cannot, and ought not to endeavour to place itself in the passive way, this constitutes one of the fundamental differences between Catholic and Eastern mysticism and Quietism. " Every passive condition into which a man puts himself opens the door to the devil." For this belongs to God, and, as St. John repeats, the one need of the soul when God places it in the beginning of contemplation, is to learn to be quiet and attentive, and to refrain any desire to act with its senses and faculties as aforetime (*A.* II, xii, 8 ; *D.N.* x, 4 ; *L.F.* iii, 33, etc.).

The only distinctions that the Saint makes is between the beginning, progress and end of Contemplation, and between Contemplation in the Night of Faith wherein it only affects the senses and faculties, and an intensified form, not different kind, of contemplation in the Night of Spirit in which it is dominant and all-embracing, operating in the spirit directly and through it upon the faculties and senses, which it brings into complete harmony with the spirit. For the Night of Spirit " is a purgation which is spiritual, in which the soul is purged and denuded according to the spirit " (*D.N.* I, viii, 1 ; cf. II, xxiv, 1, 2 and *S.C.* xxxix, 5, 6).

But let us hear the Saint himself. There are two reasons, he says, why " the spiritual person who would enter upon the spiritual way, which is that of contemplation, must leave the way of imagination and of meditation through sense, when he finds no pleasure in it, nor is able to meditate . . . which two things are almost as one." The first is that the soul has gained all the good it can by meditation. The second is " that the soul at this season has now the spirit of meditation both in substance and habit. For it must be understood that the end of meditation and reasoning in the things of God is to gain some knowledge and love of God,

and each time that the soul does this by meditation, it makes an act ; and in the same way that many acts, of whatever kind, form a habit in the soul, so many of these acts of loving knowledge which the soul has been making at particular times, come by continual repetition, to form a habit in the soul. This God also effects in many souls without the means of these acts (or, at least, without many such acts having preceded it), placing them at once in contemplation. Thus, that which previously the soul had been gaining gradually by its labour of meditation upon particular things, has now by such practice, as we have said, become changed into a habit and substance of a general loving knowledge, not distinct or particular as before" (A. II, xiv, 1, 2). This is the classic passage upon which those who claim that there is an "acquired" contemplation different in kind to that called infused, found their contention. And it can be supported by a further passage in the following chapter, in which St. John uses the term *adquirir*, "they will need to profit by meditation until they come to acquire the habit, of which we have spoken, that in some manner is perfect. . . . The soul will often find itself in this loving or peaceful state, without in any way using its faculties, that is, in particular acts, not actively labouring, but simply receiving ; and in order to arrive at this state (*para ponerse en ella*, lit. to place oneself), it will have need of helping itself, quietly and moderately, by meditation ; but being placed in it, the soul, as we have said, does nothing at all with the faculties." Here, it must be carefully noted, are to be found the precise distinctions between the act of God and that of the soul. The latter "finds itself," *se hallará*, in this state of contemplation, is "placed," *puesta*, in it ; but also "acquires the habit of it," *adquirir el hábito*, "places itself in it," *ponerse en ella*, "helps itself," *ayudarse*, by meditation to do so, but once in it, makes no further active use of the faculties in particular acts but only receives, *solo recibiendo*. And in the very same paragraph the Saint uses the terms "infused" and "passive," saying that in this state which follows upon that of meditation, "the soul itself works not

at all, save by holding itself in attention to God with love, without desiring to see or feel anything ; in which state God communicates Himself *passively*, even as to one who has his eyes open light is communicated passively, without his doing more than keeping them open. And this receiving of light which is supernaturally infused, *sobrenaturalmente se le infunde*, is *passive* understanding ; for we say that the soul works not, not because it understands not, but because that which it understands has not been gained by its own industry, but alone by receiving what is given to it." Identical language is used in *The Dark Night* (I, ix, 7, 8 ; xiv, 1), where the same Night is dealt with from the passive side, and in the recapitulation of the passage from meditation to contemplation in *The Living Flame* (stanza iii, 32).

It may be said, then, that contemplation is both acquired and infused, but not that acquired contemplation differs in kind from infused contemplation, the latter only being given in the Dark Night of Spirit which follows upon that of Faith. For this would not only appear to be at variance with the Saint's teaching, but with the parallel case of the Three Ways and the whole tenor and progress of the spiritual life, which is never one of sharply separated sections but of an ebbing and flowing rhythmic activity determined by the growth of charity within the soul and the intensity of its work as purifying, illuminating or uniting at any moment. Thus each stage may, and commonly does possess characteristics which when dealt with separately for the sake of logical and theological clarity of analysis, may convey an impression of successiveness, whereas all may be present at once although one is more emphasized and experienced at one stage than another.

What St. John does say is that many souls are brought into the Night of Faith by the gift of contemplation, who yet get no further, for one reason or another, and that these are " neither rightly in the night nor rightly out of it ; for, although they go no farther, yet, in order that they may be preserved in humility and self-knowledge, God exercises them at certain times and days in these temptations and

aridities ; and at other times and seasons, He aids them with consolations, that they may not be discouraged and turn back to worldly things " (*D.N.* I, xiv, 5). Of the same souls he says, that thus " God purges some who do not attempt to rise to so great a degree of love as others, placing them at times in this night of spiritual purgation, often causing night and then dawn to come upon them, so that the words of David are fulfilled, that He sends His crystal, that is, *His contemplation*, like morsels ; although these morsels of obscure contemplation are never so intense as that terrible night of contemplation we are about to describe " (*ibid.* II, i, 1). In both these chapters we have one, not two, contemplations spoken of, the difference between that of the two Nights being, in the Saint's own words, one of intensity (*intensos*) and of depth of penetration into the soul. There is no necessity, then, to assume the existence of an Ascetic Way as fundamentally different to that of the Mystic Way, as some writers have done. The fact is that most persevering Christians enter the Night of Faith ; this is a matter of common experience, though the experience is not usually understood. They arrive at the door of contemplation which God opens to them at times, but they remain in this " beginning of contemplation " so often referred to by the Saint as the mystic state, and do not, for reasons which God alone knows fully, go on to the Night of Spirit and the " perfection of spiritual life."

Most, if not all, of the controversy upon this matter might have been avoided if there had been a fuller recognition of three facts, each of which is fundamental to an understanding of St. John's teaching.

1. That he writes for those who are drawn to the seeking of the degree of that full union with God which, whilst it is possible in this life, is only sought for or attained by a small minority of souls. He is not writing about the common salvation, nor about the attainment of the Beatific Vision in heaven, usually reached through Purgatory, but, as we shall see, of those who have their Purgatory in this life (*D.N.* II, xii, 1).

2. He follows the common tradition of spiritual writers up to his time of using the term contemplation as applying to all states of prayer beyond meditation. He also uses it, as had been common, of the raising of the mind to God through the consideration of creatures (S.C. v, 5).

3. Further confusion has resulted from some writers largely depending upon a wrong reading of the Saint's words, *no a todos los que se ejercitan de proposito en el camino del espiritu lleva Dios a contemplacion*, "not all those who deliberately exercise themselves in the way of the spirit does God raise to contemplation" (D.N. I, ix, 9), where the term *lleva* was translated "call," with the result that it was said that he taught that all were not called to contemplation. The error being discovered, certain writers advanced the theory that all are *called* to contemplation, even though only some are *raised* to that state, and that, in consequence, the mystic state is the normal crown of the Christian life which all are called to. This brought about the counter assertion that this is not so, but that there are two ways of Christian life, one Ascetic, which terminates in Acquired Contemplation, the other Mystic, which reaches to Infused Contemplation, a theory which necessitates a distinct line being drawn between the two contemplations. As is usual in all controversies, each side quoted from St. John that which seemed to support their particular theory, ignoring or glossing the fact that, as we have shown, the Saint uses identical language of all the degrees of contemplation and, at least, in one case, speaks of what is now known as "acquired" and "infused" contemplation in the same paragraph in which he is writing of the Night of Sense. Further, the defenders of the theory that all are called to the mystic state find themselves obliged to make all sorts of qualifications when they confront the actual facts of experience, which show that, normally, at least, certain conditions, quietness, solitude, lack of distracting occupations, natural temperament and so on, are necessary to that state. Nor, again, have they sufficiently noted either the restricted scope of the Saint's teaching or the significance of his doctrine of

Purgatory, akin to that of St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Vincent Ferrer and other writers. That all are called to the Vision of God in heaven, this is undoubtedly true, but it is not what St. John is specifically concerned with. That all persevering Christians attain to the "beginning of contemplation" is, probably, also true, though many do not recognize it as such, but that all are called to the Night of Spirit and to the fulness of contemplation *in this life* is obviously not true, for the majority only enter that Night in Purgatory, as St. John teaches.

The rigid division of the "Ascetic" and "Mystic" Ways, too, could hardly have been in the mind of St. John when he wrote that "devout souls . . . run after many manners and in many places . . . each one in the place and after the manner which God grants to it, in spirit, and state, with many different spiritual works and exercises, along the road of eternal life" (S.C. first redaction, xvi, 3), and "God leads each soul along different roads and there shall scarcely be found a single spirit who can walk even half the way which is suitable for another" (L.F. iii, 51). There is great wisdom in the conclusion, suggested by P. Raynaldo Maria de San Justo and adopted by the Carmelite Congress of 1928, held in honour of St. John, that in place of the frequent use of the term "mystic contemplation" it would be better to speak of the action in general of the Holy Spirit in souls.

The whole question of whether all are called, remotely or proximately, to contemplation, can hardly be better put than in the words of Dom Chapman, which occur in letter xcix included in the second edition of his *Spiritual Letters*. "As to attainable by all: *Yes*—in the sense that all are radically capable of it. *No*—in the sense that in ordinary circumstances it is impossible for most people. For a few people (of strange psychological composition), it is possible under ordinary conditions of life. For a few it is almost impossible even in an enclosed community, and the desert would be wanted. For most, it is unlikely, except in a quiet life, and with much time for God."

It may be added that in reading many writers upon

these questions, one is forced to the conclusion that however logical and difficult of refutation their arguments often are, they yet emanate far more from the study-chair than from a view of life as it actually is, and from closer contact with pious circles rather than with the mass of striving, sinning and repenting souls who form the largest part of the Church on earth. And we may well believe that St. John, who is so severe upon directors who do not take the trouble to realize how differently God leads souls in the higher ways of the Christian life, would have been no less so upon one who indiscriminately applied his teaching to the *las gentes del campo o del ciudad* to whom he ministered. His descriptions of the way in which God Himself deals with souls, adapting Himself to their lowliness, is sufficient proof of this.

THERE is, then, an Initial and Preparative stage of Contemplation, and a Progressive and Perfective one, each of which has degrees that, except in broad outline, St. John is not concerned to distinguish between. We shall now consider the purpose, character and fruits of each of these two stages, and the behaviour of the soul therein.

1. In order that the soul may attain to union with God as St. John understands it, it is necessary that it should be stripped of everything which is not God. The first part of the Night of Sense begins this process, the second extends it to the higher faculties of the soul, intellect, memory and will. For this purpose God draws the soul out of the state and practice of meditation and places it in that of contemplation in its elementary, initial form (*D.N.* I, i, 1-3; *L.F.* iii, 30, etc.). There ensues a period, the length of which varies with different souls, in which both meditation and contemplation are found. In chap. xv of Book II of *The Ascent*, St. John says: "it is not to be understood that those who are beginning to experience this loving knowledge must never again, speaking generally, endeavour to meditate; for those beginners who are now becoming proficient, are neither so perfect in the habit of contemplation, that whenever they desire they can place themselves in the act of it, nor, in the same way, are they so far beyond the practice of meditation, that they cannot at times meditate and reason in a natural manner, as they have been accustomed to . . . rather, in these beginnings, when by the signs already spoken of they are able to see that the soul is not occupied in that repose and knowledge, they will have need to make use of meditation until they come to acquire the habit of which we have spoken, in a somewhat perfect manner, which will be when each time they wish to meditate, they find themselves in this state of knowledge and peace, without being able

to meditate or wishing to do so, as we have said ; for until they arrive at such time, which is that of proficient in this exercise, they must practise sometimes the one, sometimes the other, at different seasons " (A. II, xv, 1).

So in *The Dark Night*, when the soul begins to enter the Night of Sense (second part), " its inability to reason with the faculties increases more and more. For although it is true that with some, in the beginning, this is not so steadily continuous, so that at times they fail to leave their sensible pleasures and reasoning (since, perhaps, because of their weakness, it was not fitting to wean them all at once), yet withal, this inability ever grows within them and brings to an end the labour of sense, if they are to make progress, for those who do not progress in the way of contemplation behave very differently. For this night of aridities is not commonly continuous in the senses, sometimes they are in aridity, sometimes not ; at times they cannot meditate, at others they can." For it would seem that they who do not make progress are only brought so far by God in order to prove, humble and reform their desires, not that they may be led on " in the way of the spirit, which is this contemplation ; for not all those who deliberately walk in the way of the spirit, are brought by God to contemplation " (I, ix, 9 ; xiv, 5). Here again may be seen a similar looseness of expression as has been noted on page 333. But the whole context shows that the distinction St. John makes is that between those whom God places in the Night of Faith and state of initial contemplation, but does not raise to the Night of Spirit and to Perfective Contemplation.

Let us note the care with which the Saint emphasizes that meditation is not to be given up simply because of the feeling that one cannot meditate, or, as people often say, cannot " concentrate," but only when, in coming to meditate with the rightful dispositions and due preparation " they find themselves in " the loving knowledge and peace of contemplation.

Next to this intermittent character, are the trials ex-

perienced in this beginning of contemplation, which may be classified under the headings of Contrast, Obscurity and Aridity.

The first arise from the difference which exists between the exercise of the faculties in meditation and the cessation of that exercise in contemplation. This causes the feeling that one is "doing nothing," "wasting one's time" (*A. II*, xii, 7 ; xiv, 4, 5 ; xv, 5). The fear comes that the soul is going back, since where once there was so much activity and gaining of distinct knowledge, there now seems to be nothing done or gained. So the soul is tempted to try and force itself to meditate in the former manner, but this only makes matters worse (*D.N. I*, x, 1, 2). The advice of a director is sought, and if he be one "who has no knowledge save as of using a hammer like a blacksmith, and so can only teach after this manner, he will say : Come now, leave all this, you are only wasting your time and being idle. Get to work and meditate, make interior acts, for it is necessary to make diligent efforts of your own, these other things are the practices of Illuminists and fools." For such directors, having no knowledge of the progressive character of prayer or the ways of the Spirit in guiding souls cannot see that the acts they counsel have been done so far as the soul is capable of them ; that "when the way has been travelled, and the end attained, there is no need to set out on the way again, for this would only be to walk away from the end" (*L.F. iii*, 38).

To this trial is added that of Obscurity or darkness, caused by the new excess of light which comes through the opened door of contemplation, blinding the eyes, that is, the faculties of the soul, that they may now begin to see supernaturally (*A. II*, iv, 7), since they are now drawn away from many objects to one—God Himself (*ibid.* viii, 5, 6 ; ix). The reality and substantial good of this new "loving knowledge" which is now being given to the soul cannot be seen, recognized or appreciated at first, since it is more spiritual, "subtle and delicate," than has yet been experienced "and almost imperceptible to the senses". (*A. II*, xiii, 7 ; xiv, 8-10).

The eye of the soul needs to become accustomed to this light, as the natural eye does to a light which is greater than it is normally used to, or the soul as a climber who is only gradually able to breathe easily at a great height where the air is more rarefied than in the low foot-hills, which causes pain at first. And this trial is deepened by the fact that not only does the soul find itself unable to make any particular acts, but does not receive any particular knowledge in the intellect or reason. So it is tempted to think, or may be told that unless it has distinct thoughts and ideas the will cannot love since "only that which is known can be loved." This is true concerning the natural acts of the soul, and that is why meditation is necessary in some form or another, as the means by which distinct and clear knowledge of Divine things is gained. But in contemplation God infuses a loving knowledge of Himself more akin to that which He is in Himself, and in one act of such communication there is light and heat in one "without any distinction between the two being discerned," although "at times one faculty is more influenced than the other . . . at times, all is understanding, and very little love; at others, all is love and there is no understanding" (*L.F.* iii, 41-44). But such understanding, although it increases in clarity, never entirely sheds the obscurity of faith in which it is veiled in this life, for the open vision of God is only possible in heaven. On the contrary, the darkness deepens until the end of the Night of Spirit, since the way of contemplation is the way of an ever purer faith, enduring "as seeing Him who is invisible" (*Heb.* xi, 27). "This spiritual night, which is faith, deprives the soul of everything, both as to intellect and sense" (*A.* II, i, 1-3). "The strait gate is this night of sense in which the soul detaches and strips itself, that by this gate it may enter into it, founding itself in faith which is far from all sense, so that afterwards it may walk by the narrow way, which is the other Night of Spirit, into which the soul enters later that it may walk by pure faith to God, which is the means whereby the soul is united to God. By this road, so narrow, dark and terrible (for there is no comparison between this night

of sense and that of the spirit, in its darkness and trials) . . . far fewer journey" (*D.N.* I, xi, 4).

To be as in a strange country, in the dark, without food or drink, such is the situation the soul finds itself in upon entering the second part of the Night of Sense. And this, let us mark, is not a piece of speculative theology or mysticism, it is a commonly experienced fact known to those who set themselves seriously to the following of Christ. Much modern Christianity, partly owing to a reaction from the unnatural and unChristian gloom of Puritanism, lives on that low food of the senses which has little in common with true spirituality, and thinking that the more these are stirred, the more religion is real, naturally regards such descriptions of Christian progress as St. John, with all the Saints gives, as being alien to the Christianity of the New Testament, although, indeed, it has little sought to know what that is. Many Christians think to possess the goal without having walked by the way, and mistake the "uplift" of the emotions for the fruit of the Spirit, a licence with the things of religion for the "glorious liberty of the children of God," a stagnant, inglorious peace for that which "passeth all understanding," only given to those who have endured a holy war.

Without food or drink, this is the third trial of the entry into the Night of Faith, that dryness or aridity which arises from the fact that the food upon which the soul has been accustomed to feed is withdrawn from it, and that the new food like the manna from heaven, which God bestows, is not yet tasted to the full. Still longing after sensible pleasure and consolation, souls endeavour to find it in the old ways, to stir it up within them by one means or another, "labouring greatly to this end and finding little pleasure or none; rather the aridity, fatigue and disquietude of their souls increases, in the degree that they labour for that former sweetness." They have to learn that they need this food of sense no longer "but another food, which is more delicate, interior, and less of the senses; which consists not in labouring with the imagination, but in letting the soul

rest and leaving it in its quiet and repose, which is more spiritual " (A. II, xii, 6). As this aridity is directly caused by God bringing the soul into the second part of the Night of Sense and thus belongs to the passive side of that Night, it is more fully dealt with in the first book of *The Dark Night* in which, as we have seen, the signs are given by which it may be known to be of God and not from some lower causes. For much of what is thought to be this aridity is due to causes within the individual, or to circumstances without him. The growth of a superficial "interest" in the higher stages of the spiritual life often results in mistaking the consequences of sloth or carelessness, or of some bodily ailment for the aridity of the Night of Faith. People run to a priest complaining of dryness, etc., when what they need is a more serious application to the common things of religion and life or—a visit to a doctor.

True, spiritual aridity comes when "God weans souls from the breasts of these pleasures and delights, giving them pure aridity and interior darkness, taking from them all these follies (*impertinencias*) and puerilities, and causing them to gain the virtues by very different means" (D.N. I, vii, 5). So far, the practice of religion has been with much self-interest and according to their own desires, ways and inclinations, more a matter of preoccupation with self than in attention to God, "saving one's soul" rather than "praising, reverencing and serving God" which, as St. Ignatius says, are the means by which we save our souls (*ibid.* viii, 3 ; ix, 4-7). The more a soul desires to love God and recognizes something of the true meaning of that denial of self of which our Lord teaches the necessity, the sooner will it come into this night in which the good of spiritual things and exercises seems to vanish, and they all become apparently empty, dry and almost meaningless. But what has vanished is the superficial good by which the soul is attracted to and fed by the things and practices of religion as God wills (A. II, xvii, 5), until such time as He sees it to be grown in spirit and capable of receiving the more spiritual good which ever abides, but which is not and cannot be experienced by

the senses, and so, when it is first bestowed, causes the soul to think and to feel that it has nothing whereon to feed. Thus, at first, this aridity and emptiness is most strongly felt, and the soul is filled with anxiety and doubt as to whether it loves God although this only causes it, not to despair, but to exercise a greater care and solicitude with regard to God. This anxiety to please God increasing, "the soul is affectioned and inflamed with love for God, without knowing or understanding how or from whence such love comes, but at times seeing this flame and kindling growing so greatly in it that it desires God with yearnings of love" (*D.N.* I, xi).

Before going on to see the further benefits which are gained in the Night of Faith, we must note how the soul must behave itself in the beginning of this darkness and aridity. St. John continually repeats the same advice as to this, which is that the soul must not attempt to return to meditation or desire any "feelings" of consolation but simply "learn to remain with attention to and loving waiting upon God in that state of quietude, giving no heed either to the imagination or its working" (*A.* II, xii, 8), "and without any particular understanding or comprehension of what it is contemplating" (*ibid.* xiii, 4; cf. xv, 3, 5). "Let those who find themselves in this state, take comfort, persevere in patience and not be anxious; let them trust in God who abandons not those who seek Him with a simple and right heart, nor will fail to give them what is necessary for the way, until He raises them to the clear and pure light of love which He will give them by means of that other dark Night of Spirit, if they merit that He should bring them into it." They are not to meditate or reason, since the time is past for that, however much they feel they are doing nothing or that their not wanting to think at prayer-time is due to weakness. "All they need do is to exercise patience and to persevere in prayer without exerting themselves, but simply leaving the soul free, disembarrassed and at rest from all knowledge and thinking, not, in this state, troubling about what they shall think or meditate

upon, but contenting themselves alone with a peaceful and loving attention to God, without care, and without being able or desiring to experience or enjoy Him " (*D.N.* I, x, 3-5 ; cf. *L.F.* iii, 31 ff.).

Our natural activity and desire to do and to see which causes us to imagine that unless we are actively doing something nothing is being done makes the learning of this lesson difficult for us. We are apt even to imagine that in our doing we are accomplishing a much harder task than in training ourselves in this quiet attention to God. But anyone who has done so knows that activity is child's play in comparison with this passivity of the soul which, far from being a "doing nothing," is, in reality, the highest activity possible to us. It is precisely the simplicity of it which makes it difficult to such lovers of complexity as we are, who, however, need so much, as Rupert Brooke said, to "busy our hearts with quietude," against the ultimately destructive forces of speed and noise to oppose those of deliberation and silence. "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength," "Be still, and know that I am God." In the degree with which the soul corresponds to the operation of God at this time by training itself to rest, "the more it will grow therein and experience that loving general knowledge of God, in which it has greater pleasure than in anything else, since it causes peace, rest, pleasure and delight without labour" (*A*, II, xiii, 7). For these blessings come as they are not sought directly, for to seek "experiences" in prayer is to miss the main object of prayer and to open the door to self-deception and the devil. The one thing necessary is the placing of one's self in a receptive attitude before God that the Divine Light may shine within the soul, taking care "not to interpose other more palpable lights of forms, ideas or figures of any kind of reasoning ; for none of these are similar to that pure and serene light" (*ibid.* xv, 3). Thus, as says St. Jeanne Frances de Chantal, "In this state of holy indolence our capacity for love grows greater and the shafts of Divine love strike far more deeply ; our own activity keeps the soul chained, it is in stillness that it grows," and

"The longing of a loving heart for God and its endurance of unwilling difficulties is one of the most perfect prayers . . . when we pray we should be as empty vessels before God, into which His grace may be poured drop by drop if He so wills, and we should be as ready to go home with our vessel empty as if He had filled it to the brim" (*Entretien*, xxx). For if it seems that we have gained little or nothing this is not actually so, for at least we have gained a little more of the attitude in which alone God can do with and in us as He wills. And St. John tells us that in this food given, in the midst of darkness and aridity to the spirit many inestimable blessings are worked in the soul, despite the fact that it feels itself to be deprived of blessing.

First, there is a much truer and deeper self-knowledge, tending to a more real humility, which is the recognition and confession of the truth about one's self. Formerly, when the soul found much sensible pleasure and consolation in God it was apt to be contented and satisfied in its service of God. The common, yet quite erroneous idea that the greater its progress the better it would feel, that fervour meant feeling, emotional uplift, grew, with the result that there was much danger of falling into the imperfections which the Saint recounts in chaps. ii-vii of the first book of *The Dark Night*. It now learns that the more real progress there is, the worse one will know oneself to be, that fervour has nothing to do with feelings, but consists in a growing detachment from, and so from the danger of being influenced by them, in less reliance on one's own efforts, and the greater exercise of endurance, patience, humility, perseverance in the way of God. From "this fount and source of self-knowledge proceed . . . more respect and courtesy" in approaching God, for "in this night and aridity of sense," the soul learns more of the majesty and excellence of God, who besides "quenching the desires and pleasures and attachments of sense, cleanses and frees the intellect that it may understand the truth." So, as all spiritual writers teach, from the knowledge of self we rise to the knowledge of God, as says Augustine, "Let me know myself, Lord, that I may

know Thee.” Further, in thus gaining spiritual humility in this new knowledge of self in relation to God, the soul ceases to imagine itself better than others, or to compare them with itself, hence rising to a truer love of its neighbour as it is delivered from that “ pietistic self-occupation and regard of the morals of its neighbour ” which Pere Didon calls “ satanic,” and to which so many are given. So, too, the soul grows in obedience and abandonment, gladly listening to its spiritual teachers, desiring to be guided rather than to go its own way, and so escaping from numberless delusions and imperfections which it was wont to weave and wander in (*D.N.* I, xiii).

In this dark Night of Sense the imperfection of spiritual covetousness and gluttony, in which spiritual things were sought for the pleasure they afforded to self, is reformed, since now the soul learns the reason why this seeking for satisfaction in the things of religion only fails in its purpose, owing to the fact that they are not meant, nor are able to satisfy, but only to create and further desire for God alone. Care is here to be shown, for liable as we are always to go to extremes, it is easy to fall into a certain contempt for the things of religion, and for a soul to make “ such moderate use of them that it might possibly lose, through default, what before it had lost through excess.” Thus on coming into and progressing in this night the soul must faithfully make use of the ordinary things and practices of the Christian life, outside of its prayer of contemplation, lest it fall into a more dangerous form of spiritual pride, as was the case with the Quietists who taught that no practices or acts of any kind were any longer necessary. St. John goes on to say that ordinarily “ God gives to those whom He leads into this night, humility and readiness, though without sweetness, so that whatever is commanded them, they do for His sake alone, no longer seeking profit in many things because they now find no pleasure in them.” This means that we are to go to Mass, the Sacraments, Divine worship, to communion and prayer, not with the primary idea or desire of “ getting good ” out of them, but simply to please God and to grow in

love for Him. No apparent absence of good is to have any influence upon us, we are to go in faith, that is, in the firm belief that good is there according to God's will and quite independently of our sensible recognition of it, that, indeed, the real spiritual good of the things of religion can only be perceived and received by faith, not by sight, touch or feeling.

Now, then, that the soul's attention is more set upon God, that there is a keener recognition of what He is and of what it is, there is also a more habitual recollection of God, the quiet recollected attention of prayer-time permeating the whole day. And with this a more profound perception of the need of the soul for God and a fear of backsliding upon the spiritual way which stirs the soul to fidelity and perseverance.

One virtue cannot be gained and practised without bringing others in its train, so that as what we have said comes to pass, so patience and endurance, love of God, fortitude, and all the theological and cardinal virtues increase both in soul and body and are practised in this night. As to what was noted about the imperfections of spiritual anger, envy and sloth, with regard to the first, the soul no longer gets angry with its shortcomings and failures, but simply acknowledges them with contrition and goes quietly on its way, recognizing how vain and foolish is all dwelling upon, often with a morbid pleasure, its faults, or being disheartened by them. Nor will it be angry with those of its neighbours, so common a fault, nor with God because He allows the continuance of imperfections and falls in the soul, the which, indeed, is almost its only means of learning humility and of being spurred on to progress.

It no longer envies those who are preferred to itself or have, apparently, greater advantages, since it recognizes that the only thing which matters is what God wants of itself and that for this He ever gives sufficient grace. And the weariness it now experiences is other than the sloth of former days which resulted from its little desire or from its not finding the pleasure it looked for in spiritual things, for

this new weariness is the consequence of a desire for God comparable to which all else is nothing worth.

Certain undiscerning writers have accused St. John of bringing the soul into nothing but a state of pain, misery and fear. Nothing is farther from the truth, even in the Saint's account of the Night of Spirit; he speaks of the joys experienced by the soul in the midst of that thick darkness, which, after all, he never sees as more than a means and way to the highest possible happiness. And here, in dealing with the passive side of the Night of Sense, all is of "benefits and blessings," since to him, as to St. Paul, "all things work together for good to them that love God," and what the world and the conventional Christian regard as evil, he sees to be means of the soul's most real and enduring good. Actually what such writers are accusing is not St. John but our Lord and the teaching of the New Testament, which is as demanding as anything that St. John wrote.

It is only in detachment from spurious and partial goods that the soul is capable of receiving the true riches of God, who "often, in the midst of these times of aridity and hardship, when the soul least thinks it, communicates spiritual sweetness and purest love, with spiritual knowledge, at times very delicate, each bestowal of which is of greater value and profit than any enjoyed before; although in its beginnings the soul does not think so, because the spiritual influence now given to it is very delicate and unperceivable by sense." So comes liberty of spirit and an increase of the twelve fruits of the Spirit, deliverance from the world, the flesh and the devil, purity of soul, desire to serve God, and the gradual calming of the desires and passions with stilling of the activity of the faculties, that so the soul sings

In a dark night,
With anxious love inflamed,
O happy venture!
I went forth unobserved,
My house being now at rest.

Thus far we have been thinking of those who are led into the Night of Faith, and St. John has said that only a few

who so enter this night are led beyond it into the Night of Spirit. But those whom God desires to bring into this Second Night experience, whilst yet in the Night of Sense, further "grave trials and temptations of sense, which endure for a long time, although longer in some than in others." These are fierce and especially imaginative temptations against chastity, blasphemies against the faith and the spirit Isaiah calls *Spiritus vertiginis* (Is. xix, 14), which troubles the mind with scruples and problems for which it finds no solution or escape, either by thought or by seeking advice upon them. As a rule such trials only befall those who are going on to the Night of Spirit, to the end that such souls may be exercised and prepared for union with the Divine wisdom.

The length of time which any soul will remain in this Night of Sense cannot be known, although it will probably be long (*D.N.* ii, 1), nor do all experience it in the same manner or degree. This is also true of the sufferings and temptations of the Night of Spirit, St. John's descriptions of which are doubtless coloured, as are those of other writers, by his own experiences. For whilst parallel cases may be found in other Saints and holy souls, there are others in whom these trials take different forms. That which in one appears in the form of severe physical, mental or spiritual sufferings, may be experienced by another in the form of Apostolic labours, or, as in St. Albert and St. Thomas, in unremitting devotion to sacred study. There is no mass-production or stereotyped methods in the workshop of God, each soul, a separate creation, is treated according to its nature, capacity and needs, and the place it has been created to fill in the temple of God.

2. The Night of Faith and of Initial and Preparative Contemplation usually lasts for years, most souls, as we have seen, never getting beyond it, but yet making progress, so that they gradually pass from the state of beginners to that of proficients who "go about the things of God with much greater breadth and satisfaction of soul, and with more abundant and interior delight than they had at the

beginning, before entering this night " in which the soul " now very easily finds in its spirit the most serene and loving contemplation and spiritual sweetness without the labour of meditation," although, since its purgation is not yet complete, " it never fails to have necessities, aridities, darknesses and dangers at times much more intense than those which are past, that are as presages and messages of the coming Night of the Spirit, although they are not lasting, as will be the night which is to come " (*D.N.* II, i, 1).

It is in this later period of the Night of Faith that occur those various physical phenomena of rapture, trances and the like which, regarded by some as evident signs of high sanctity, are but the consequence of the inability of the frail body to bear the increasingly strong spiritual communications made to the soul, and which, as the sensible part grows purer, flow from the soul into the senses, sometimes causing bodily sufferings, and at others those extraordinary states which, later on, in those who are " purified by the second night of the spirit, these raptures and sufferings of the body no longer exist." We often hear people say of some great emotion of joy or sorrow, " It is more than I can bear," or see the influence such things have upon bodily condition and health. To a much greater extent the inflowing of Divine love often has a similar effect upon the body, and there are numerous instances of Saints who have prayed that God would lessen such communications because of the effects they caused in the body (*D.N.* II, i, 2).

St. John treats these phenomena a little more at length in the twelfth stanza of *The Spiritual Canticle* in which he differentiates between those which occur in souls who are in the state of progressives and those who have arrived at perfection and are near to the Spiritual Betrothal. In the former state, he says, these " visits of rapture " so tear soul and body apart that unless God preserved the life of the soul it would come to an end. So both body and soul suffer through the union which exists between them, the soul, in these raptures, abandoning the body, no longer acting through it, so that it remains senseless and feels no pain which may

be inflicted upon it. But in those who have attained to perfection, such raptures cease, the high communications of God being received in peace and gentle love, this being due to the effecting of that perfected harmony of the whole nature which is one of the final results of the Night of Spirit.

The reason for the necessity of the Dark Night of Spirit for those whom God desires to raise to the fullest union with Himself in this life, must now be examined. It is that the roots of imperfections lie in the innermost recesses of the soul, in that spirit which the purgation of sense cannot reach. For that is concerned with the activities of the soul, exterior and interior, the Night of Spirit with the substance of the soul itself. It will be remembered that St. John distinguishes between the faculties and the substance of the soul, teaching that the former are purified apart from the latter and that whilst the union of the substance of the soul is permanent, that of the faculties is transient, even in the high estate of the Spiritual Marriage (S.C. xvii, 9). Proficients, then, who have now come to the close of the Night of Sense and have been purified from actual imperfections, now require to be purged from those "imperfect habits and affections the roots of which still remain in the spirit . . . the stains of the old man" which the spirit does not yet perceive are hindering its union with God. There also exists in them "the *hebetudo mentis* (dullness of mind) and the natural coarseness (or lack of delicate perception) which every man contracts through sin, and the distraction and outlook of the spirit, which must be illumined, clarified and recollected by the pains and dangers of that night" (D.N. II, ii, 1, 2.)

The essential reason for the necessity of the Night of Spirit, either here on earth or in Purgatory, is that human sin and imperfection is rooted in the spirit, not merely in the senses or faculties by which the spirit operates, but in the innermost depths of man's nature. St. Thomas had already pointed out that the uncanny and almost demoniac power of the animal forces in human nature were due to the fact that man is more than an animal, that he is body united to spirit which has almost infinite desires, so that sin is always

and ultimately a spiritual thing. The measure of his good is the measure of the depth to which he may fall. And St. John adds, that none can reach to or heal that innermost spirit but God, the Divine Spirit Himself.

The Saint digresses here for a moment to say that all do not fall into actual imperfections in the same way, but that there are some, of whom he has already spoken in *The Ascent*, who, receiving many spiritual blessings, become the victims of delusions suggested by the devil, and "lose holy fear, the key and custodian of all the virtues," so that it is very doubtful whether they will return to the "pure road of virtue and true spirituality." For, considering themselves to be more spiritual than others, they are the more incurable, a fact very noticeable in many adherents to modern cults. A further reason for the Night of Spirit is that "as the lower part of the soul still participates in these spiritual communications, they cannot be so intense, pure, and strong as is required" for the perfection of union with God, so that to come to this the soul must enter this Night, wherein "denuding sense and spirit entirely from all these apprehensions and pleasures, it may be made to walk in darkness and pure faith, which is the proper and adequate means whereby the soul is united to God" (*D.N.* II, ii).

In this Night, then, both parts of the soul, which in that of Sense have been more corrected and restrained than, to speak exactly, purged, are here purged together, that "the gold of the spirit may be purified and refined," and the soul grow up in all things "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. iv, 13), by means of this "purgation, contemplation, or detachment or poverty of spirit, which here are as one and the same thing" so that, "finally, by means of this night of purgation of the old man, all the forces and affections of the soul may be renewed in a Divine temper and delight" (*ibid.* III, iv). "This dark night is an inflowing of God into the soul, which purges it from its ignorances and imperfections, habitual, natural and spiritual, which is called by contemplatives infused contemplation and mystical theology." If the

reader will compare this definition with those given earlier in *The Ascent* and the first book of *The Dark Night*, it will be noticed that what particularly characterizes it is the extent of its purgative operation in distinction to that beginning of contemplation which is mainly concerned with raising the faculties from their natural operation to one of the fullness of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. For this is necessary to the perfection of the normal Christian life, which can only be obtained by a progress, both of detachment and prayer, which involves a passing from the state of beginners, that of meditation, to that of contemplation which already St. John has plainly described as infused by God, who thus meets the soul's efforts when these can go no farther. Thus they may be said to have acquired this contemplation in the sense that they have placed themselves in the attitude in which it is acquirable, although God alone can bestow it. But that further degree of contemplation infused into the soul in the Night of Spirit does not of necessity belong to the normal Christian life but is only given to those few whom God wills to raise to the Spiritual marriage, and is to them, as we shall see, the equivalent of that Purgatory which the majority of Christian souls only come to after death. It is this purgatorial character which is marked throughout this Night and distinguishes it from that which precedes it, as St. John himself says (*D.N.* II, iii, 1).

This intensified communication of Contemplation is that of "the loving wisdom of God," designed to effect purification and illumination in the substance of the soul, and is the same wisdom that purges and illumines the blessed spirits (*vide* II, xii, 3). This Divine light is called a dark night for two reasons, first, because it transcends all the natural powers of the soul; and second, because it causes pain owing to the impurities which still remain in the soul and have to be burnt away in this fire of Divine love.

It might almost be said that one of St. John's primary objects is to expose the illusion that the nearer one approaches to God the more pleasurable will be the effect. But "our

God is a consuming fire " (Heb. xii, 29), and not merely a warming and comforting one. To come near to a fire, carefully choosing how near, is to warm oneself as one desires ; to be drawn to the fire by its own force is to be consumed by it. Beginners in the spiritual life, as St. John has shown, draw near according to their own desire and in the degree that they gain pleasure therefrom, and often, when God would have them come nearer, shrink back in dismay. But the more desiring and courageous stretch forth their hands to the flame, as St. Andrew did to the cross and St. Laurence to the fire of martyrdom, and submit themselves to the operation of the cleansing fire which separates the gold of the spirit from the dross of earth.

Thus, when the Divine light invades the innermost spirit, penetrates into the secret places of the heart, so hidden from the soul itself, it feels its own weakness and impurity to be so great as to be set against God and God to be against it. The soul's *Domine non sum dignus* becomes the cry of realized truth, all its once conceived goodness has vanished, its righteousness is but filthy rags, the words of the Saint's confessions, once thought to be no more than pious exaggerations, are now seen to be the cries of souls drawn within the flames of that Bush which burns yet is consumed not, nor consumes ought save the rubbish the soul has gathered to itself. And this occasions suffering in the whole nature, still naturally, morally and spiritually weak and frail, so that the soul cries out with Job, " Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, at least ye my friends, for the hand of the Lord hath touched me " (Job xix, 21). The soul, experiencing this so close contact of the Divine with the human, feels itself as reduced to nought, cast out and abandoned by God, no less than by creatures, in whom no help is to be found, for it sees itself deprived of " three kinds of good which are ordained for the pleasure of the soul, which are the temporal, the natural and the spiritual ; finding itself set amongst contrary evils, namely, miseries of imperfection, aridity and emptiness of the apprehensions of the faculties, and abandonment of the spirit in darkness " (*D.N.* II, vi, 4). It is as a diver im-

prisoned in his diving suit with the air-line cut, so that he breathes with increasing difficulty, or as a piece of iron in the furnace, its impurities and rust being burnt away, for this fire of Divine love penetrates to the very substance of the soul, wherein are the roots and stains of all the affections and imperfect habits it has contracted in this life. This experience is not continuous, God gives intervals of respite when it is less intense. But at times it is so strong that "it seems to the soul that it sees hell and perdition opened before it. For these are they who in truth go down living into hell, for they are purged on earth in the same manner as there, since this purgation is that which would have to be endured there. Thus the soul that passes through it here, either does not enter that place, or is detained there but a short time, for it profits more by one hour here than by many there" (*D.N.* II, vi, 6).

The Saint returns to this identity of the Dark Night with Purgatory in chap. x where he describes the action of the Divine, purgative light as that of fire upon a log of wood, which begins by driving out the moisture, then renders it black and unsightly, finally kindling it with heat and transforming it into itself. So the soul is dried and purged of its imperfections, by which process it sees its interior disfigurement as never before and perceives its unfitness for union with God, whose hatred of evil now becomes so apparent that the soul esteems itself to be forsaken by and abhorred of Him, and thus may be learnt "the manner in which souls suffer in Purgatory. For the fire would have no power over them, even though it came near to them, if they had no imperfections for which to suffer, which imperfections are the material upon which the fire seizes; which being consumed, there remains nothing more to burn."

Again, the title of chap. xii has "this horrible night is purgatory," and in the first paragraph "even as spirits are purged in the life to come with dark material fire, so in this they are purged and cleansed with loving, dark, spiritual fire."

The reference to hell in chap. x and to material fire in

chap. xii may puzzle the reader who is unfamiliar with the teaching of St. Thomas which St. John has in mind here. This is to be found in the two appendices compiled by Nicolai from the Saint's *Commentary on the Sentences*, and inserted by him between questions lxx and lxxi of the treatise on the Last Things in the Supplement to the *Summa Theologica*, most of which is the work of Reginald di Piperno. Here, purgatory and hell are said to be near together, and "it is the same fire which torments the damned in hell and purifies the just in purgatory," being "eternal in its substance but temporary in its cleansing effect in purgatory." The writer guards himself by saying that this is the probable opinion and most in accord with the statements of the Fathers and with many revelations, although since Scripture is silent upon the matter and reason can afford no decisive arguments, nothing can be affirmed with certainty. As to the question of how a material fire can affect the disembodied soul in Purgatory, Nicolai refers the reader to article iii of question lxx where the question is discussed at length. In the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, St. Thomas had already laid down that it must not be thought that incorporeal substances could be affected by a material fire in such a way as to corrupt or alter their nature, and in the above question he is careful to begin by saying, "If it be admitted that the fire of hell is not so called metaphorically (*supposito ex praedictis quod ignis inferni non sit metaphorice dictus*), nor an imaginary fire, but a real corporeal fire, we must say that the soul will suffer from such a fire, since the Lord has said that it has been prepared for the devil and his angels, whose nature is a spiritual one as is that of the disembodied soul." What he has to do, then, is to find an explanation which would justify both the common tradition as to the materiality of the fire and the immateriality of the soul. This he does by saying that as by sin the will turns inordinately to material things so it is fitly punished by that which is material. Now it is contrary to the natural will of the soul to be subject to a body over which it should rule, and the fire is an instrument of Divine punishment which *detains* the soul as in a place from

which it would be free. If the fire is material and in some way affects the fallen angels who are purely spiritual, then it can, in the Divine order, affect the disembodied soul, and this by binding it to what is below it. But St. Thomas does not commit himself to the definite statement that the fire is a material one, as may be seen in the quotation already given from the *Summa*, and in the *Contra Gentiles* he says that although some of the punishments with which sinners are threatened in Scripture are to be understood in the material and strict sense, "this does not forbid our giving a spiritual and metaphorical interpretation to certain expressions of Scripture which refer to the punishments of the damned" (IV, xc). Thus whilst he shows that the traditional belief is not irrational, he refuses to go beyond the silence of the Church which, both at the Council of Florence and that of Trent, refused to pronounce upon the question of the materiality or otherwise of the penal fire.

The identification of the Dark Night with Purgatory is, of course, not peculiar to St. John, but is to be found in St. Catherine of Genoa and Ruysbroeck, as in the common teaching of the Church that some souls pass directly to heaven.

Among other sufferings of this Night which St. John finds aptly described in such passages of Holy Scripture as in the book of Job, the Psalms, Jeremiah, he mentions the sudden recalling to mind of the evils in which the soul stands, for which there appears no remedy, or of times of consolation now past, the lack of help and support in any instruction or from one's director whom, though he may try and show how all this is for the soul's blessing, it cannot believe him, thinking that he does not understand the trials it is passing through. Moreover, so greatly are its faculties and affections held and hindered that it cannot raise the mind or heart to God, neither petition Him (*ni le puede rogar*), for it seems to it as if there were a cloud between it and God which its prayer cannot pass. And when at times it prays it is with little strength and in such aridity that it

cannot believe that God will hear or answer it, and is as Jeremiah, saying, "When I cry and entreat, He hath shut out my prayer." "In truth this is no time to speak with God, but to place its mouth in the dust, as Jeremiah says, so that, perchance, suffering its purgation with patience, there may come to it some present hope. For it is God who is now passively working in the soul, so that it can do nothing. Hence it can neither pray nor assist with attention at the Divine Office much less attend to other things and temporal affairs," and will suffer frequent loss of memory so that it knows not what it has done or is doing (*D.N.* II, viii).

As we read the Saint's vivid descriptions of these afflictions, we must not omit to note, as some critics of the Saint's teaching have, first, the end to which they all are designed to lead, and second, the mitigations which he shows accompany them. To begin with the latter, St. John says, that to be effective this Night will last for some years, and this because there occur intervals of relief "wherein, by the dispensation of God, this dark contemplation ceases to assail the soul in a purgative form and manner, and assails it in an illuminative and loving way, in which the soul, as one who has gone forth from such dungeon and imprisonment, and placed in recreating breadth and liberty, feels and tastes great sweetness of peace and loving friendship with God, with ready abundance of spiritual communication. This is a sign to the soul of the health which is being accomplished by the said purgation, and a foretelling of the abundance for which it hopes" (*D.N.* II, vii, 4). Thus there are unevenly alternating periods, now of afflictions, now of peace, each of which the soul thinks will last, only to find one coming to nought before the assault of the other (*ibid.* 6; cf. x, 9).

The end for which all this is effected in the soul is "that it may be regenerated in spiritual life by means of this Divine inflowing, and in these pains may bring forth the spirit of salvation, that the saying of Isaiah may be fulfilled; In thy sight, O Lord, we have conceived, and we have been as in the pains of labour, and have brought forth the spirit of

salvation " (*D.N.* II, ix, 6, with which compare the beautiful exposition of St. John's Gospel, chap. i, 13, in *The Ascent*, II, v, 5).

The way is to be understood and trodden by reference to the end to which it leads, the peace of God can only be attained by the rejection of and purification from the illusive peace of earth, the true and enduring pleasure of the Marriage Feast only tasted by those who detach themselves from the sensible taste of spiritual things, and eating " the bread of affliction," journey through the dark night toward the unveiled dawn. " Deep is this warfare and combat, for the peace which the soul hopes for will be very deep ; interior and delicate the spiritual pain, for the love which it comes to possess is also most interior and pure. For the more interior and perfect the work is to be and to remain, the more interior, perfect and pure must be the labour, for as the labour is strong, so will the edifice be firm " (*The Ascent*, II, ix, 9).

The whole of St. John's doctrine of the Night of Spirit is, it will be seen, immensely illumined by his plain statements that it is Purgatory, endured in this life, in which to those whom God leads from meditation to contemplation, " which is more of a heavenly than an earthly state," He " communicates Himself to the spirit, which being yet impure and imperfect and having evil habits, each soul suffers according to the degree of its imperfection ; and at times this purgation is in some ways as painful to the soul whom it is disposing for the receiving of perfect union here on earth as is that of Purgatory, where we are purged that we may see God in the life to come " (*L.F.* i, 20). And just as the Church teaches that the holy souls in Purgatory are passive under the Divine operation, not being able to do anything for themselves, and that their state is both one of suffering and of joy, so, says the Saint, is the Dark Night of the Spirit.

From the study of the especially purgative side of the operation of the Divine Wisdom we go on to see how its action becomes ever more perceived by the soul as an illumination

and enkindling of Divine love, "a certain experience and foretaste of God," although, the faculties still being in darkness, the soul does not grasp this in a definite manner as will come to pass later. The soul begins to gather the fruit of its afflictions, and its spirit "feels itself to be passionately in love," yielding itself to this passive infusion of love, "the warmth and strength and temper and passion of which is all of God." Two words of Scripture inevitably come to mind upon reading this, those of our Lord at the end of His prayer to the Eternal Father, "That the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them" (John xvii, 26), and St. Paul's "because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us" (Rom. v, 5).

Divine Charity, *caritas Dei*, is thus to be seen, not merely as a natural human love raised to God, but as a gift descending from Him into the soul, something of the eternal and unchanging love of God Himself, bestowed upon the soul and enabling it to transcend its natural power. And since in God wisdom and love are one, the distinction of the Divine attributes only existing in our minds, love and wisdom, St. John says, are infused together to each one according to his capacity and need, enlightening and purging the soul, in the words of the Wise Man, from its ignorances (*D.N.* I, xii, 2). This loving Wisdom is that which the scholastics, following Dionysius (*Coel. Hier.* viii), taught illumines and purifies the angels, "enlightening them as to what they know not, and flowing down from God through the first hierarchies even to the last, and thence to men." Thus, those hierarchies which are nearest to God receive this illumination in the most powerful degree, and "man who is the lowest of all those to whom this loving communication flows down continually from God, receives it, when God desires to give it to him, after his own manner and with pain." The angel, being pure spirit, suffers not, but man, being impure and weak, "receives this contemplation and loving knowledge in the distress and yearning of love of which we are now speaking." And, as the Saint has already

said, this is not at first perceived by the soul which must be gradually habituated to the Divine operation ; as wood is first dried and then enkindled by fire, so the soul first experiences the drying up of its natural faculties, and when this is accomplished, the enkindling of those same faculties with the fire of Divine love, which having united the intellect and will, now begins to transform the whole soul into itself (*D.N.* II, xii, 3-6 ; xiii).

Chaps. xiv-xviii contain little more than the discussion and elaboration of points which have already been dealt with, although there are some golden sayings which deserve notice. Despite the afflictions and perils of the Dark Night, the soul travels therein in great security, not only for reasons already given, but also " because it has been suffering ; for the road of suffering is more secure and even more profitable than that of possession and enjoyment ; first, because in suffering the strength of God is added to it, while in possession and enjoyment the soul exercises its own weaknesses and imperfections ; second, because in suffering the soul continually acquires and exercises the virtues and grows in purity, caution and wisdom " (*D.N.* II, xvi, 9).

Comparing the secret, infused wisdom of God to a ladder by which the soul ascends to the knowledge and possession of the treasures of Heaven, he says, that on " this road to go down is to go up, and to go up is to go down, for he that humbles himself is exalted and he that exalts himself is humbled." We may add that this is much to be pondered by those whose spiritual life is little more than an anxious struggling up a ladder the while they think to cast off faults and acquire virtues, that arriving at the top they may be met with our Lord's " Well done," whereas they would be better employed in finding their place at the foot of the ladder, in that humility and emptiness which is where God looks for them. Further, if we consider the progress of the spiritual life from the point of view of what we can see of it, for the most real part is hidden from us, we shall see that " it suffers many ups and downs," its times of prosperity being followed

by storms and trials, so that the former seem to be given to forewarn of and strengthen us against the latter. And the reason of this is that for perfection two things are needed, the knowledge of God and of oneself, so that the soul must be exercised first in one and then in the other. Finally, "the principal reason for which contemplation is called a ladder . . . is that it is the science of love . . . an infused loving knowledge of God which both illumines the soul and inflames it with love, raising it step by step even unto God its Creator, for it is love alone that unites and joins the soul with God" (*D.N.* II, xviii). Of this ladder of love St. Bernard and St. Thomas have distinguished ten steps, or degrees, which are, the languishing of the soul for God, the seeking of God without ceasing, the persevering with great fervour, an habitual suffering yet with patience, the vehemence of desire for God, the running swiftly after Him, great boldness in prayer, the seizing upon and holding fast of the Divine Lover, the delight of union so far as it is possible in this life, from which the soul comes directly to the Beatific Vision, for those who have attained the ninth degree "enter not into Purgatory, since they have been wholly purged by love" (*D.N.* II, xix ; xx).

Thus clothed and disguised in the livery of the three theological virtues, the white tunic of faith, which St. Peter speaks of as the best protection from the devil: "Whom resist steadfast in faith," and which is the foundation of all virtues, for without it, says St. Paul, it is impossible to please God ; the green vestment of hope, wherewith the soul is delivered from the second enemy, the world, since by hope it looks for and desires the things of eternal life, in comparison with which those of the world are nothing worth ; and over all, the splendid purple garment of Divine charity, which not only hides the soul from the third enemy, the flesh, but gives worth to all the other virtues, the soul goes forth in liberty of spirit "from low things to high ; from terrestrial to celestial ; from human to Divine," to "the perfect union of love of God, its beloved Salvation." For it has now become wholly spiritual, and having received the blessings

CONTEMPLATION (II)

of purgative and illuminative contemplation, attains to the last degree of unitive contemplation, "which is the Divine Betrothal between the soul and the Son of God," for some account of which, since the present treatise ends abruptly, we must turn to *The Spiritual Canticle* and *The Living Flame*, which will be considered together.

WE have already referred to the modern controversy concerning the two principal versions of *The Spiritual Canticle*, a brief account of which is given in the Introduction to Professor Peer's English edition of the Saint's Works. The problem is not sufficiently germane to the purpose of this book to require more than the statement that, accepting, as we do, the second redaction (codex of Jaén), as St. John's own revision of a first manuscript, and as P. Silverio says "the most authoritative of its versions," we have followed it in this chapter, in which all the references are to this second redaction as given in Professor Peer's edition. Neither *The Spiritual Canticle* nor *The Living Flame* require, nor, indeed, lend themselves to, such a detailed and scientific exposition as does the previous work. Not only have the fundamental principles which underlie, and in the philosophical and theological terms of which St. John expresses himself already been considered, but the lyrical and impassioned language in which he now pours forth his soul in describing the heights of the Mystic State cannot be transcribed into lesser terms, which would be even less adequate than the Saint confesses his own to be (S.C., Prologue). Nor need we wonder that they are for the most part "above our heads," since, as he writes, although they deal with "certain points of scholastic theology concerning the interior commerce of the soul with its God," yet if one who is more or less ignorant of this theology, "wherein Divine mysteries are comprehended," possess the knowledge of mystical theology, "which is the science of love, wherein these truths are not only known but also experienced," he will be able to enter into them. But let us be clear as to the Saint's use of that sadly abused term "experience" which in our day has come to mean something far different to what it did to him. He does not mean any kind of "religious" or "semi-religious" experience such as is felt in the emotions when

aroused by some outward object, the solemnity of a religious function, the words of a preacher, sensible devotion in religious exercises and the like, or similar experiences arising from the contemplation of beautiful scenery, exquisite music or any such contacts with nature or art. Nor—even less—would he fall into the common error of our time, of making any such experience the foundation and source of Christian belief even to the point of implying, as some moderns do, that the experience may exist without any reality external to self to be experienced. On the contrary, almost his first words in *The Spiritual Canticle*, are a repudiation of all such meanings of the word. “It is to be understood that if the soul should experience any great communication or sentiment or spiritual knowledge, it must not for that persuade itself that such feeling is to possess or see God clearly and essentially, or that it is to possess God more, or to be more in God, however much it may seem to be so; and that if all these sensible and spiritual communications fail, leaving it in darkness, aridity and desolation, it must not think that God is failing it now any more than before; since, in reality, neither by the one can it know with certainty that it is in His grace, nor by the other that it is without grace. . . . So the principal intent of the soul in this line (Whither hast Thou hidden Thyself?) is not merely to beg for sensible and affective devotion, in which there is neither certainty nor clarity of the possession of the Spouse in this life, but principally to beg for the clear presence and vision of His Essence wherewith it desires to be assured and satisfied in the next” (i, 4). This, of course, only confirms that which St. John has been teaching all through his first book, that no kind of sensible or spiritual communication, that is, nothing given to and received either through the external or interior senses and faculties of the soul is God Himself or any experience of Him, but only remote means, infinitely distant from, and other than God, by which the soul is led towards Him, but by which it can never attain to Him. For this reason they are to be more and more set aside as the soul journeys on, using them so

long as they are necessary, but ever less attending to them that its gaze and desire may be set on God Himself, to whom faith, hope and charity alone unite it.

The whole progress of the soul is measured and determined by its detachment and prayer, one of which cannot exist without the other, and in this Cantic, the stanzas of which "treat of the exercise of love between the soul and Christ the Spouse," we are brought to the closest intimacies of prayer, for here "are touched upon and expounded some points and effects of prayer" in its highest development, "the most perfect degree of perfection to which a man may attain in this life" (S.C., Prologue; *L.F.*, Prologue, iii). Even here, St. John is careful to make us see, the soul does not come to a state of stagnation or inactivity, the end is not a "dead end" any more than is that of the Beatific Vision of Heaven. There is, indeed, a degree of perfection peculiar to each soul, beyond which it cannot pass (cf. *A. II*, v, 10, 11), but there are no limits to its growing comprehension and love of God; "with time and practice, as I say, the soul may become more perfected and grounded in love" (*L.F.*, Prologue, 3, 4).

The Spiritual Cantic has three main divisions, the first of which treats of the Purgative Way, which in St. John's mind extends from the outset of the seriously Christian life to the entry into the Night of Faith; second, of the Illuminative Way which includes the Night of Faith and that of Spirit, dealt with in the second book of *The Dark Night*, and brings us to the Spiritual Betrothal; the third, of the Unitive Way of the Spiritual Marriage. The first two ways are treated, as it were, in a retrospective manner in stanzas i-xiii, the state and effects of the Spiritual Betrothal in stanzas xiv-xix, the rest being devoted to the Spiritual Marriage (cf. xxii, 3). Much of the matter of the earlier stanzas has been included in previous chapters of the present work, so that it only remains to note some few points which are here emphasized. The soul in its early seeking after God usually falls into the error of Augustine, "I found Thee not, O Lord, without, because I erred in seeking Thee without that wert

within." For "the Word, the Son of God, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is hidden, in essence and presence, in the inmost being of the soul ; so that the soul that would find Him must go forth by the detachment of its affection and will from all things, entering within itself in fullest recollection, so that all things are as nothing to it. . . . It is a great contentment for the soul to understand that God never fails it, even though it be in mortal sin, and much less when it is in a state of grace. . . . There desire Him, there adore Him, and go not about seeking Him outside thyself, for so shalt thou be wearied and distracted. . . . Yet one thing is to be remembered, that, although He be within thee, He is hidden. But it is a great thing to know the place where He is hidden in order to seek Him there with certainty."

How common is the question, If God whom I seek is so within me, why do I not find, nor feel Him ? St. John answers, Because we do not hide ourselves within from outward things, in order to find this Divine Treasure, for which the wise merchant gave all that he had, " thou must forget all that is thine, withdraw thyself from all creatures, hide in the interior retreat of thy spirit, and shutting the door upon Thee (that is, shutting thy will upon all things), pray to thy Father who is in secret " (i, 8, 9).

St. Bernard gives another answer to this question which is worthy of remembrance, since it exposes the fact that our failing, as we imagine, to find God, is because we so frequently ascribe to ourselves what is due to that very presence of God within us. " How do I know that God is present ? Why, because He is living and full of energy. I perceive His presence by the renewed activity of my heart ; by the sudden victory over sinful desires I know His Power for good ; by conviction of secret faults I learn to marvel at the depths of His Wisdom ; in amendment of life, small though it be, I see His Goodness and Mercy ; in the recreation and renewal of my mind, I glimpse in some slight degree, the excellence of the Divine Beauty." And St. Catherine of Siena says, " The sign which revealed Thy

presence was that the soul remained in joy and courageous virtue."

St. John, as we have seen, insists upon the companion truth, that when all such signs are absent, and the soul feels empty and deserted, God is no less present, rather, it is His Presence which causes this experience in which the soul is deprived of all signs that it may rest solely upon faith and love, which are "the two servants of the blind, who will guide thee by a way thou knowest not, to the hidden place of God" (i, 11; cf. A. II, iv, 2, 3). "Be not like many ignorant persons who have low ideas of God, thinking that He is farther away and more hidden, when they do not understand Him or have no experience or feeling of Him; the truth being, on the contrary, that the less they perceive Him distinctly the nearer they approach to Him" (*ibid.* 12).

In the third stanza, the manner of the soul's seeking God by its own activity is described. "She must exercise herself in the virtues and spiritual practices both in the active and contemplative life; and to this end must not accept favours or delights"; 'nor allow herself to be hindered by the snares of the world, the flesh and the devil, "for the way to seek God is to do good continually in God and to mortify evil within oneself." So by the path of self-knowledge, the soul sets out upon the way of meditation upon creatures, by means of which, it considers the greatness and excellence of the Creator (*ibid.* iv), and passing on to see how all things bear the impress and beauty of the Word, "by whom all things were made," and in whom God beheld them very good (*ibid.* v).

Yet can none of these messengers heal the wound of love which the soul bears inflicted upon her by the touch of her Beloved, so that she begs: "Thou that art giving Thyself in part to my soul, give now the All that Thou art" (*ibid.* vi). For all these glimpses vouchsafed through the irrational things of the universe, through the rational creation of men and angels, and even more through the Incarnation and the mysteries of the Faith, and those "touches of highest knowledge of the Divinity," all serve to quicken a love so vehement

that it can neither be understood nor expressed, save as a very dying of love (*A. II, vii*), in which joy is mingled with pain, and the soul longs for freedom from this life that she may enjoy the full fruition of union with the Beloved in that to come (*A. II, viii-xi*). So with a great desire the soul calls upon faith, "as that which shall give her most vivid light from her Beloved and as the means by which she may come to spiritual Betrothal with God" (*ibid. xii*), in which all her pain caused by the spiritual communications made to her, so great as to almost divide soul from body, may be assuaged in the perfection of loving union with God (*ibid. xiii*).

In the following two stanzas there "is contained the most that God is wont to communicate to a soul at this time; but it is not to be understood that to all who arrive at this estate He communicates all that is expressed in these two stanzas, nor yet in one and the same way and means of knowing and feeling; for to some souls He gives more, to some less; to some in one way, to others in another; although souls belonging to one or the other can be in this state of spiritual betrothal." Here, the soul "enters into a state of peace and delight and sweetness of love wherein she does naught else but recount and sing the grandeurs of her Beloved, which she knows and enjoys in Him" (*ibid. xiv, 2*). And how will this stern, uncompromising, demanding friar, who has torn the soul away from everything which is not God, speak of this state, in what terms describe it, whence turn for language to embody it?

My Beloved, the mountains,
The solitary, wood-enshrouded valleys,
The far-off islands,
The resounding rivers,
The murmur of love-inspired breezes.

The night peaceful and calm
As the dawn unveils in the East,
The music all-silent,
The echoing desert,
The supper that recreates and quickens love.

These, together with the remaining stanzas, reveal the intense appreciation of and delight in natural beauty which the Saint had, as we learn from the fact that he used to recite his morning office out of doors before he said Mass, and frequently took his novices into the garden and up into the hills that amidst the beauty of created things they might praise the Beloved who is in them all. He was fully conscious, too, of the truth of the statement of St. Thomas, referring to the use of metaphors and similes in Holy Scripture, that this is fitting and necessary, since when spiritual truths are expounded by means of figures taken from material things, even the simple, who cannot grasp intellectual things of themselves, are able to understand something of these truths. Indeed, it is better that they should be so expressed, for then it is clear that these metaphors are not literal descriptions of Divine truths but only symbolic and analogous terms which suggest something of the truth which can only be known to us in this life by such inadequate language (*S.T.* I, 1, ix). The modern scientist, confronted with the mysteries of nature, is in exactly the same position as the theologian and mystic face to face with the mysteries of God. With his *confrères* he can talk in the language of the higher mathematics, though he knows that even these are no more than symbols which only express a tithe of the truth, but if he is delivering a popular lecture, he uses terms and illustrations taken from things his audience is familiar with, knowing that the realities he is trying to convey some idea of are as far above and different as can be imagined.

So St. John, "mountains have height, they are abundant, far-reaching and beautiful, graceful, flowery and fragrant." The great, snow-capped peaks reared in majestic solitude against the blue sky, the wide expanse of mountain ranges, as one sees the Alps from Monte Mottarone above Stresa, or the serried masses stretching down the Engadine from near Nauders, or the rose-tinted two hundred miles of Himalayas from the upper Brahmaputra valley; the graceful beauty of the Matterhorn and Jungfrau, the flower-

covered sides of the mountain slopes above Pragelato, the fragrance of the pine forests, all these "My beloved is to me," and how much more. The "quiet, pleasant, cool, shady valleys" with their rippling brooks, the variety of trees, the sweet song of birds, all delighting and recreating the senses and the mind; "the strange, far-off islands" set like precious stones in emerald seas, adorned with wonders outside our normal experience, isles of surpassing loveliness, yet which in these days of "cruises" thousands pass unnoticed as they sit at bridge, or dismiss with an exclamation, as they do God who not only "has all the strangeness of islands never seen, but whose ways and counsels and works are very strange and new and wonderful to men." Great, sounding rivers, roaring as does the St. Laurence as it hurls itself over Niagara, or as the Brahmaputra fills the cañons with echoing thunder in its descent from the highlands of Tibet, assailing, says the Saint, and submerging all they meet, filling up the low valleys, drowning all other sounds with their tremendous voice. So the Spirit of God sweeps into and takes possession of the soul, drives out its low desires and fills it with humility and all good, and with the voice "of many waters," adapted to each thunders or whispers according to its need. Breezes of loving knowledge, comparable to those which come from scented groves, or to the gentle touch of cool air following upon a day of tropic heat, are the communications of God given to the soul directly from on high; tranquil repose of night which draws near to the dawn of the Beatific Vision; silent music of the order and harmony of creation wherein all things give praise to their Creator and Lord; echoing solitude, as when one stands in some high, lonely plateau above the noise of earth's traffic, and gradually perceives that the silence is full of innumerable, almost indistinguishable sounds as of the breathing of creation heard for the first time, "the witness that all things give in themselves to God," which may only be heard when the soul withdraws itself from all outward things. The banquet of the soul at evening tide, when the day's work is done and there comes "the understanding of" the sure termination of evil

things and the possession of things which are good "to the recreation and inflaming of the soul in love to God. All this—and how much more beyond all human telling, "my Beloved is to me" in this spiritual Betrothal of which these words are said.

The difference between this state and that of the Spiritual Marriage, the Saint notes in the last paragraph of these stanzas, is that although immense blessings are here bestowed upon the soul by the visits of the Beloved, yet these are but visits and the soul still "suffers from His absences" and from temptations and disturbances arising from the lower part of the soul, and from the devil "all of which cease in the estate of Spiritual Marriage." Thus in stanza xvi, she prays that the foxes, the envious and malicious spirits, the raging desires of the senses, the various wanderings of the imagination and any attention to things, may be driven away, that undisturbed in the vineyard of the virtues, she may gather and offer them in love to the Beloved. The soul, too, shuts out the north wind of dryness "by means of continual prayer and devotion," invoking the soft south wind of the Holy Spirit which enkindles love, that so all the virtues may revive, as flowers in the garden under gentle rain, and diffuse their sweetness both within and without, as an Indian proverb says, "The scent of a flower goes but with the wind, but the perfume of a holy life goes even against the wind." And thus prays the soul, not as aforetime, chiefly for her own delectation, but that the Beloved may delight in her, as is said in many places of Holy Scripture.

So great and wide is the subject that the metaphors and comparisons change with each stanza. Now, in the eighteenth the soul is like a great lord in prison, suffering from the loss of possessions, with very little food, insulted by servants, the sensitive desires which rise up to prevent the soul's attaining the good granted to it by God. She begs to be delivered from foes of her own household, and that God will manifest Himself only to the higher part of the soul where alone His most spiritual graces can be received.

Stanzas xx and xxi describe what is necessary, and what

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God does to bring the soul to the high estate of Spiritual Marriage. For this the lower part of the soul is now brought into perfect conformity with the higher in a complete and harmonized nature, the activity of the imagination and phantasy made to cease, the four passions, joy, hope, grief and fear brought under control, the three faculties, intellect, memory and will brought to the perfection of their objects, so far as may be in this life, and the whole soul transformed into God and become Divine, in the sense the Saint has frequently described (cf. *A.* II, v, 7 ; *D.N.* II, xxiv ; *L. F.* ii, 29, 30).

The characteristic features of the Spiritual Marriage are, the total possession of the soul by God in so Divine a manner that " while neither of them changes its being, each appears to be God," in which the flame of Divine love which is the Holy Spirit, burns within and transforms the soul, as fire transforms a log of wood into itself (*L.F.* i, 3). For " love unites the soul to God " and now the soul has " attained to Him according to the whole capacity of its being," so that the Divine Love, once purifying and illuminating for the burning away of all the imperfections of the soul, now so enkindles it that it is enraptured, immersed and wholly converted into Love itself, knowing nought but love, having no other exercise but love, whether in doing or suffering, in engaging in affairs temporal or spiritual, " for its work is to love, and of this work, which is love " the soul has now come to its consummation and perfection, that which is " the whole desire and aim of the soul, and that of God in all the works of the soul." Now is " the grandeur and stability of the soul in this estate so perfect that if in past times there came to it the waters of any sorrow, even those of its own sins or those of others, which is what is most often felt by spiritual persons, now, although it still recognizes their gravity, they do not cause it pain or sorrow ; and it no longer has the sentiment of compassion (one manuscript reads ' *composición* ' for ' *compassion*,' probably an indication of the Saint's meaning, that is, of a sorrow affecting the lower nature, as he goes on to say), though it performs the works

of compassion and has the perfection of it ; for in this state the soul no longer has the weakness of its virtues, but their strength remains, constant and perfect ; for in this transformation of love, the soul is like unto the angels, who understand sorrowful things perfectly without feeling sorrow, and exercise works of mercy without feeling compassion (being pure spirits who have no passions) ; although sometimes and at certain seasons, God dispenses with this, and enables the soul to feel and suffer that it may merit the more and increase in the fervour of love, as He did with the Virgin Mother, with St. Paul and others ; but this does not necessarily belong to this state " (S.C. xx, 10). This is an interesting passage, not only as illustrative of the now harmonized condition of the soul in which all its powers are dominated and controlled by its being so completely possessed by God, but also because of the clear distinction between compassion and passion, between a real and deep understanding of things which cause grief and suffering, and of having the emotions carried away by the knowledge of such things so that, as often, the mind and judgment are blinded and the will impelled to act without discretion.

In this state the mind and will of the soul are as the mind and will of God, for it has received the answer to its long-uttered, *Fiat voluntas Tua*, having now but one remaining desire, and that in all peace and tranquillity, to see God in the open vision of Heaven. It has come to an awareness, an intimate experience of God, which is the essential characteristic of the Spiritual Marriage, " a touch of the Substance of God in the substance of the soul " (*L.F.* ii, 19), for it " understands and experiences the nature and attributes of God in the shadow of God, that is, by understanding and experiencing the nature of Divine power in the shadow of omnipotence ; and it understands and experiences the Divine wisdom in the shadow of that wisdom ; and infinite goodness in the shadow of infinite goodness which surrounds it ; and the delight of God infused in the shadow of the delight of God " (*L.F.* iii, 14). That which both reason and faith have enabled the soul to believe is now seen by an intuitive glance

of the intellect made one with God's own seeing, not, indeed, as perfectly as in heaven, but in a degree which is the foretaste of that full vision, "a certain vivid sight and image of that perfection which is altogether ineffable" (S.C. xxxviii, 4), "a seeing with the intellect . . . a ray and image of fruition, which is in the intellect, wherein is fruition" (*ibid.* xiv, 16). New depths of knowledge are infused into the soul now capable of receiving them, for no gift of God can be "received apart from the capacity and without the co-operation of the soul" (S.C. xxx, 6), for in this solitude in which God alone is the regard and desire of the soul, "He guides, moves and raises it to Divine things, that is to say, He raises her intellect to the Divine Intelligence since now it is denuded of other contrary and wandering intelligence; and He moves her will freely to the love of God, since now it is alone and free from other affections, and He fills her memory with Divine knowledge, since it, too, is now alone and emptied of other imaginations and phantasies" (S.C. xxxv, 5). Such acquisitions of knowledge, which concern all that may be known, both in nature and in grace, are called new because of the clearer manner in which they are now perceived, no longer being given through the senses or faculties but directly to the soul (S.C. xxxv, 6), and although new in this sense, they are not to be thought of as being greater than that "substantial communication of the Spirit," that possession of God Himself which the soul already has. Thus in this "accidental" knowledge, "all the new joys and pleasures which come to the soul serve more to remind it to delight in what it already possesses and experiences within itself, than in these new joys, for it is greater than they" (S.C. xx, 12).

The emphasis which the Saint places upon the forgetfulness of all things and the voiding of the soul of all knowledge gained in the ordinary way must not lead us to ignore his plain statement that in this state of "unknowing" the soul does not lose "the habits of the acquired sciences which it had; rather, they are perfected with a more perfect habit, which is that of supernatural science which has been infused

into it, so that although these habits of acquired science no longer rule over the soul, so that it cannot gain knowledge except through them, there is no impediment to their doing so at times." It is as when a great light overwhelms a lesser one, yet does not destroy it, "so, I understand, it will be in heaven, where the habits of acquired knowledge in the just will not be destroyed, though they will not be of much concern to them, since they will know so much more in the Divine wisdom than by any acquired knowledge" (S.C. xxvi, 16). This, of course, was the meaning of the reply of St. Thomas when urged to complete the *Summa*, "I can do no more, such things have been revealed to me that what I have written seems but straw." He had already compared and differentiated between acquired and infused knowledge in a passage which St. John must have studied. "The wisdom which is acquired by human effort . . . gives a man sound judgment with regard to Divine things according as he makes a right use of reason. . . . But there is another kind of wisdom which comes down from above . . . and judges Divine things in virtue of a certain co-naturality or affinity with them. This wisdom is a gift of the Holy Ghost . . . and by it a man becomes perfect in Divine things, not only by learning but also by experiencing them" (S.T. II, II, xlv, 1).

This infused knowledge is, first of all, an increased and ever-deepening perception of the Being of God Himself as revealed in His attributes, since in this life He cannot be known in that Simplicity and Unity which He is. St. John in speaking of this uses almost the same words as St. Augustine, who says, "God is all that He has." "God, in His one and simple Being, is all the virtues and grandeurs of His attributes," that is, He does not possess them as separate qualities, but is, in His undivided Being, Omnipotence, Wisdom, Goodness, Eternity, Justice, Mercy, Love, etc. And since it is God, and not something of God, to whom the soul is united, "it is enabled to see in Him all these virtues and grandeurs clearly and distinctly. And as each of these things is the very Being of God in one single simple

reality, which is the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit, each attribute being God Himself, and God being infinite light and infinite fire, it follows that in each of these attributes . . . He gives light and burns as God " (*L.F.* iii, 2-6)

This experimental knowledge of God contains within itself both "the morning and essential knowledge of God which is knowledge in the Divine Word . . . and the evening knowledge of God, which is the wisdom of God in His creatures and works and admirable ordinances" (*S.C.* xxxvi, 6). St. John is here using the well-known division of Angelic knowledge, derived from St. Augustine (*Gen. ad lit.* iv; *Civ. Dei.* xi), into that of the eternal existence of things in the Word, that is, as ideas in the Divine Mind, and that "evening" or later knowledge of things as actually created, the distinction being "between knowing anything as it is in the Word of God, and as it is in its own nature." The soul, then, penetrates further into the Divine mysteries both of grace and nature, entering into "the lofty caverns of the rock," which, as St. Paul says, is Christ, "in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," perceiving ever more vividly the mystery of "the hypostatic union of human nature with the Divine Word, and the corresponding union which is that between men and God, and in the agreement which exists between the justice and mercy of God concerning the salvation of the human race." This mystery of God in Christ can only be thus fully apprehended when the soul has passed "through much suffering and received many favours from God, both in the intellect and senses, and has exercised itself in spiritual matters," all of which "are inferior to the wisdom of the mysteries of Christ, and are preparations for coming to them" (*S.C.* xxxvii, 1-4).

In this divinely infused knowledge, too, it is the joy of the soul "to know creatures through God, and not God through creatures; to know the effects through their cause, and not the cause through the effects . . . for "there is revealed to it in this great renewal that Divine life and the being and harmony of every creature in it which has its movement in God," who although He moves not "is the

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beginning and root of all movement ; remaining stable in itself . . . it renews all things,"

*Rerum, Deus, tenax rigor
Immotus in Te permanens.*

For God, the soul is enabled to see, " is always moving, ruling and giving being and power and grace and gifts to all creatures, containing them all in Himself, virtually, presentially and substantially ; so that in one single glance the soul sees that which God is in Himself and that which He is in creatures." Thus the soul is delivered from the illusions of its natural way of thinking and judging, in which " we believe others to be as we are ourselves, and we judge others as we are ourselves, our judgments beginning with ourselves and not with the things outside ourselves. . . . Hence, when we are slothful and negligent in the sight of God, we think that it is God who is slothful and negligent with us, as we read in the forty-third Psalm, where David says to God : ' Arise, Lord, why sleepest Thou ? ' " (A. V, xliv, 23 ; cf. l, 16-21). St. John has told us already how by the exercise of meditation upon creatures the soul approaches the inner realities, not only of the Divine mysteries, but also of the virtue and beauty with which God clothed the natural creation when He beheld it all in the Word, His Son, and foreshadowed then, " speaking according to the sense and affection of contemplation," " how in the vivid contemplation and knowledge of created things the soul sees with a great clarity with what a great abundance of graces, powers and beauty God has endowed them, that they appear to be clothed with an admirable natural beauty, derived and communicated from the infinite, supernatural Beauty of the Image of God " (S.C. vi, 1), all of which is even more clearly seen in the Spiritual Marriage in which creatures are known in and through God, in whom " they live and move and have their being." He has told us also that only when we have denied ourselves of the joy and pleasure which comes from creatures, directing all our faculties to God, are we free from the danger these good things are to us, that, in a word, and

that one re-echoed by modern writers who are not specifically concerned with the religious aspect, renunciation is alone the way to true possession of and joy in things (cf. *A. III*, xxvi ; xx, 2-3). For only so, and to an amazing degree, is all the truth and beauty and goodness of created things restored to us transfigured and usable with safety, in an immeasurably heightened appreciation of nature, art, literature and music ; the form and colour of a flower, the lines and delicate tracery of an arch or window, the significant value of words as used by a master of prose or poetry, the piercing beauty of melodic and harmonic sounds, all have become new as seen and heard in that intuitive vision of Supreme and Ultimate Truth and Beauty and Goodness which is God Himself.

So the desiring soul, through much tribulation, has come to "the heaven where it would be," to "the peace of God which passeth all understanding," to "the glorious liberty of the children of God," to that inebriation of love, the description and song of which fills the pages of *The Spiritual Canticle* and *The Living Flame* in language that have never been surpassed, and which it would be almost sacrilegious to attempt to translate into any other terms. For it is the Saint's own experience which is here recorded, an experience which is incommunicable, can only be stammered in symbols and metaphors which will be but foolishness to any but the spiritual man as St. John well knew.

Yet if now on the common land,
No longer am I seen or found,
Thou wilt say that I am lost :
That wandering, enthralled by love,
Myself I lost, and was found.

"In this stanza the soul replies to the tacit censure which worldly persons are apt to pass upon those who give themselves truly to God, saying that they are extravagant in their singularity and love of solitude and in their manner of life, saying further, that they are useless with regard to important matters, and are indifferent to that which the

world values and esteems" (S.C. xxix). To whom the soul replies with the Apostle, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord . . ." (Phil. iii, 8-15), of which passage St. John is a worthy commentator, as, indeed, he especially shows himself to be of Holy Scripture in general throughout these two works. Anyone who can free himself from the merely literal and so often dreary and commonplace—where not also destructive—character of most modern commentaries upon Holy Scripture, will find here something of that richness which was ever the food and delight of Christian souls, until so many were led astray by the wiles of the devil, who, as Aldous Huxley has so aptly said, began by quoting Scripture, and when that failed, used the Higher Criticism to prove that it had no more value than the Pickwick Papers.

Two questions remain for some elucidation. First, who is the Bridegroom whom the soul espouses in the Spiritual Marriage ; second, the place of the Gifts of the Spirit in the progress of the soul to and attainment of this high estate.

The first is occasioned by the fact that St. John sometimes speaks of the Word as the Bridegroom, and at others of the Holy Ghost and, again, of the Blessed Trinity. But underlying these apparent differences there is, as so often in the Saint's writings, a theological principle which in one passage he brings out clearly. This principle is that the distinction which exists between the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity is not one of Essence, each being God in the full sense of the word, but only of relation, by which is meant "that regard to its opposite which is not expressed in the term essence" (S.T. I, xxviii, 2), so that "person," as used in this connection, "signifies in God a relation as subsisting in the Divine Nature" (*ibid.* xxx, 1). To put it, perhaps, more simply, the term Father as applied to God implies a relation, Father connoting Son, as also the love existing between Them, which as being an Act within the Divine Life itself, is also personal, the Holy Spirit. Now although different exterior activities are ascribed in Holy Scripture to one or other of the Three

Divine Persons, yet this is not to be understood as if one acted without the other, for every such act is that of God who is the Trinity. For example, we commonly speak of God the Father as Creator yet without excluding the Son "by whom all things were made," or the Holy Spirit who "moved upon the face of the waters" bringing order out of the chaos of formless matter. So St. John although he speaks of the Word as the Bridegroom because it is by Him who is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" that we are brought into union with God, and so, too, of the Holy Spirit as the "Lord and Giver of Life," he, in the passage we have referred to, says, "The soul explains how the Three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost are they who effect within it this Divine work of union . . . and although the soul here names the three Persons, because of the properties (distinctions) of their effects, it addresses only one of them, saying, Thou hast changed death into life." For they all work in one, and the soul attributes the whole of their work to one, and the whole of it to all of them (*L.F.* ii, 1; cf. *S.C.* xxxix, 4-6).

In treating the second question it will be well to begin by quoting the salient references to the work of the Holy Ghost in the Saint's writings, going on to the received theological teaching with which he was familiar and in the terms of which he expresses the experiences of the soul, concerning the seven gifts and their mode of operation.

Commenting on our Lord's words, "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit . . .," the Saint says, "This means, he that is not born again in the Holy Spirit will not be able to see this kingdom of God, which is the state of perfection; and to be born again in the Holy Spirit in this life is to have a soul most like to God in purity, not having in itself any mixture of imperfection, so that pure transformation can be accomplished in it through participation of union (with God) although not in essence" (*A.* II, v, 5).

"The Holy Spirit illumines the intellect which is recollected and according to the mode of its recollection, and it cannot find any other greater recollection than in faith; and

thus the Holy Spirit will illuminate it in nothing more than in faith. For the purer and more refined in faith is the soul, the more it has of the infused charity of God, and so much the more is it illumined and the gifts of the Holy Spirit communicated to it, for charity is the cause and the means by which they are communicated to it." And he notes that this communication of light by the Holy Spirit is as "different in quality from that which is in faith . . . as is the most precious gold from the basest metal" (A. II, xxix, 6).

"The sons of God, as St. Paul says, who are transformed and united in God, are moved by the Spirit of God, that is, are moved to divine actions in their faculties" (A. III, ii, 16). By the purgation of the Dark Night the soul comes to that union in which it understands no longer by its natural light of reason, but "through the Divine Wisdom wherewith it has become united" and the will no longer loves after a natural manner, "but with strength and purity of the Holy Spirit" (D.N. II, iv, 2), by whom contemplation now flows more fully into the soul, for it "is the loving Wisdom of God by which He works great effects in the soul" (*ibid.* v, 1); that "mystical theology, which theologians call secret wisdom . . . which the Holy Spirit infuses and orders in the soul" (*ibid.* xvii, 2).

In the estate of Spiritual Betrothal "the things which God communicates to the soul are so interior that by no exercise of her faculties can she of herself experience them or put them into practice if the Spirit of the Spouse," the Holy Spirit, whom she invokes, did not "awaken love within her" (S.C. xvii, 3, 4). This "breathing of the Holy Spirit through the soul, which is the loving visitation of the Spouse, who is the Son of God," who "first sends His Spirit, who is His forerunner, as He did to the Apostles, to prepare for Him a dwelling" (*ibid.* xvii, 8), and to bring the soul to that degree of purity, strength and love which is necessary for the Spiritual Marriage, for this is the work of the Holy Spirit "who intervenes and causes this spiritual union" (*ibid.* xx, 2). By the agency of the same Spirit God grants increasingly greater favours "to souls that have

made progress, inebriating them in the Holy Spirit with a sweet wine of love delightful and strong" (S.C. xxv, 7), and bringing them to the full possession of "the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, in such manner as the soul is able to receive them" (*ibid.* xxvi, 3). Commenting upon the line "The breathing of the air," the Saint says, "This is a capacity which the soul says God will give her there, in the communication of the Holy Spirit; who, as one aspiring, uplifts the soul most wonderfully with that His divine breathing, informing and enabling her that she may aspire in God the same aspiration of love which the Father breathes in the Son, and the Son in the Father, which is the same Holy Spirit that God breathes into the soul . . . in the said transformation, in order to unite her to Himself. For it would not be a true and total transformation, if the soul were not transformed in the Three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity, in a revealed and manifest degree." A magnificent exposition of the truth of the soul's participation in the Divine Life, as taught by our Lord in the seventeenth chapter of St. John and by St. Peter (2 Pet. i, 2-4) follows (*ibid.* xxix).

The Spiritual Canticle is largely occupied with our Lord as the Way, the Truth and the Life of the soul's union with God; in *The Living Flame* we hear the vehement cry of the Spirit-possessed soul, "Oh, living flame of love," which "flame of love is the Spirit of its Spouse . . . the operation of the Holy Spirit in the soul transformed by love . . . by which the acts of the will are united and rise upward, being carried away and absorbed in the flame of the Holy Spirit," who is the sole mover of all the acts of the soul in this state of perfection; and whose effect "is to make the soul live spiritually in God, and experience the life of God. . . . For this feast of the Holy Spirit takes place in the substance of the soul, where neither the devil, nor the world, nor the flesh can enter" (L.F. i, 3, 4, 6, 9, 30). This operation of the Holy Spirit is described as a "burning of love" which consumes not nor destroys, as the Church says at Pentecost: "There came fire from heaven, burning not but giving

splendour, consuming not but enlightening" (Feria ii; Response of Third Nocturn). Or it is an overshadowing, as is said of the Holy Spirit at the Annunciation of Mary, by which the shadows of the Divine attributes not only touch the soul, but it "is united with and experiences them in shadow" (L.F. iii, 12-14). It is the unction which during the time of betrothal and expectation "is the proximate preparation for union with God," inspiring the soul with a fervent desire for God, "for the desire for God is a preparation for union with God" (*ibid.* 25). For "the Holy Spirit is the principal agent and mover of souls and never ceases His care for them" (*ibid.* 45), "a breathing of God Himself . . . where-with He most profoundly absorbs it in the Holy Spirit, inspiring it with the most delicate love for Himself . . . which transcends all description and all sense" (*ibid.* iv, 17).

Especially to be noted in the above passages is St. John's mystic interpretation of our Lord's words concerning the new birth; the double operation of the Holy Spirit in illumining the intellect and moving the will; the distinction between the light of faith and that of faith illumined by the gifts of the Spirit; that it is the Holy Spirit who both prepares the soul for and brings it into union with God; that the seven gifts of the Spirit operate within the soul in a progressive, ever increasing intensity and fullness; and that it is by Him that the unique, essential character of the mystic state, which is an intimate experience of God, is brought about.

In all this St. John is at one with the general tradition of the great theologians and mystical writers, who teach that, as St. Thomas says, "there is a happiness exceeding the nature of man, to which he can attain only by Divine power and in virtue of a share in the Divinity . . . so man needs certain God-given principles to direct him to his supernatural happiness just as by natural principles he is directed to a natural end . . . and these are the theological virtues . . . by which the mind is united to God" (S.T. I, II, lxii, 1 and lxviii, 8). But these theological virtues alone are not sufficient, they need to be elevated and

perfected by the Gifts of the Holy Spirit which impel the soul, as Jacques Maritain has aptly said, "to divine things in a divine *way* and make them act under the very direction of the Spirit of God and His loving art." These Gifts are bestowed upon the soul with sanctifying grace in Baptism and are designed, not only to perfect the virtues but to render the soul docile, receptive and responsive to the Divine will and action. It will be remembered that in the mind of the Church, as in her early practice, Baptism and Confirmation are one, and probably only became separated from practical reasons, e.g. when it became the practice for priests to baptize at all times instead of at Easter and Pentecost, when, normally at least, the Bishop baptized, large numbers of people had to wait until the visit of a Bishop, to whom Confirmation was reserved. Hence, as the writer has seen in the East where, owing to distance and infrequent Episcopal visitation Confirmation is often delayed, there would be, and are, people of all ages to receive the Sacrament as well as infants but recently baptized. Further, since the virtues and gifts do not normally operate actively until children have come to the use of reason, Confirmation assumed the function, not of bestowing the gifts, but of awakening them to action. This, as St. John has said, depends upon the degree in which these Divine and interior dispositions are recognized and yielded to by each soul, and such recognition and surrender is in all a gradual process. Thus, as the soul becomes more passive in the hand of God, so do the Gifts operate more fully and strongly, and theologians, especially since St. John's day, have distinguished between an influence and operation of the Gifts after a natural or human manner, and one which is after a more distinctly supernatural or superhuman manner. The former belongs to the "ordinary" Christian life, to the "beginners" who are brought into the Night of Sense but are not raised by God to the Night of Spirit. The latter is the manner of the operation of the Gifts in the Night of Spirit and the states of union which follow, wherein, as St. John says, the soul is brought to the full possession of the Seven Gifts, in such manner as

it is able to receive them. The Saint does not use these terms, but he does make a distinction of degree between the beginnings, the intermediate and the highest stages of the soul's progress in contemplation, which is one of a passage from the first definite response to the influence of the Holy Spirit wherein the Gifts mingle, as it were, with the activity of the faculties to that ever more complete surrender in which they dominate and so absorb the whole soul that all its acts are the acts of the Spirit of God within it, yet without destroying its freedom but rather perfecting it, since the soul wills more wholly and strongly than it could or did in its natural state.

Nor does St. John mention any of the Gifts by name, unless possibly in some uses of the term Wisdom, but the pages of *The Spiritual Canticle* and *The Living Flame* are full of the substance and significance of the teaching of St. Thomas upon the Gifts of Understanding and Wisdom, as will be seen by some quotations from the latter. "It is natural for human nature to perceive Divine things only in the mirror of creatures and in the deceptive shapes of things which distantly resemble them, and for this perception faith perfects the soul. But the Gift of Understanding, as says St. Gregory, enlightens the mind concerning truths received so that man even in this life receives a foretaste of the revelation which is to come" (Comm. on the Sentences, D, XXXIV, i, 1). And of Wisdom, that it leads "to a God-like and as it were explicit contemplation of revealed truth which faith holds in a human manner" (*ibid.* XXXV, ii, 1). "Wisdom, the Gift of the Holy Spirit . . . comes down from above . . . and differs from faith, for faith assents, but Wisdom the Gift judges, and so presupposes faith, for a man judges well that which he knows" (S.T. II, II, xlv, 1, ad. 1). And so judges, he adds, by a certain affinity and by "experiencing Divine things . . . which is the fruit of charity which unites us to God. . . . Thus Wisdom the Gift has its cause, that is, charity in the will, but its essence is in the intellect" (*ibid.* 2). "The first care of Wisdom is the contemplation of Divine things, which is the sight of the

Beginning" (S.T. II, II, xlv, 3, 3). "Uncreated Wisdom first unites Himself to us by the Gift of charity, and by this reveals the mysteries, knowledge of which is infused wisdom" (*ibid.* 6, ad. 2).

Finally, St. John's own life reveals the truth that although contemplation must not be sought as an aid to action, even as God must not be sought for as an auxiliary to man, but for Himself alone, yet the highest most efficient and enduring activity derives from contemplation. "Action is subject to time in which it takes place and disappears, . . . action triumphs over time only as it descends from contemplation, which unites the spirit to eternity" (Maritain, *The Things that are not Cæsar's*, p. 110). We are created to see God and to possess and be possessed by Him in that eternal life of loving knowledge spoken of by our Lord, which, as St. Gregory says, "begins here in that contemplation of God which is perfected in heaven." In a vigorous and emphatic passage St. John condemns, not active work for God by those who are called to it, but, first, any attempt to persuade one who has reached the high estate of union and "degree of solitary love," to engage in active works, since "a very little of this pure love is more precious in the sight of God and the soul, and of greater profit to the Church, even though the soul appears to be doing nothing, than are all these works together." And, second, those who being called to the active apostolate of souls, are tempted to become wholly immersed in "their outward works and preachings," and to forget "that they would bring much more profit to the Church and be much more pleasing to God, to say nothing of the good example they would give, if they spent even half this time with God in prayer, even though they had not reached to such a height as this. Certainly, they would accomplish more with one work than with a thousand, and that with less labour, because of the merit of their prayer and the spiritual strength they would have gained by it, for to act in any other way is to hammer vigorously, and to do little more than nothing, sometimes nothing at all; indeed, at times, even to do harm" (S.C. xxviii, 2-4). And those who

are given to much listening to sermons and the reading of many spiritual books, may take to heart the words addressed to the nuns of Beas. "What is lacking is not writing or speaking, for of this there is generally too much, but silence and work," which "bring to the spirit recollection and strength. And therefore, when a person once understands what has been said to him for his profit, he needs neither to hear nor to say more, but rather to practise what has been said to him silently and carefully, in humility, charity and self-contempt, and not to go away seeking new things, which serve only to satisfy the appetite in external things (and even here are unable to do so), and leave the spirit weak and empty, with no interior virtue" (Letter vi). To directors of souls, the long digression in stanza iii of *The Living Flame* is especially valuable. In such, the fundamental requirements are knowledge, discretion and an "experience of the nature of pure and true spirituality." It is not enough to have some knowledge of the early way of prayer, which is meditation, for in this case the director will not be able to guide souls who are passing from this to contemplation, but, on the contrary, by trying to pin them down to meditation will only hinder them. "Let such guides of the soul take heed and remember that the principal agent, guide and mover in this matter is not the director, but the Holy Spirit, who never loses His care for them; and that they themselves are only instruments to lead souls in the way of perfection by the Faith and the law of God, according to the spirituality that God is giving to each one. Let them not, therefore, merely aim at guiding these souls according to their own way and the manner suitable to themselves, but let them see that they know the way by which God is leading the soul, and if not let them leave it in peace and not disturb it." The director's office is to prepare the soul for the receiving of God's work within it by leading it to detachment and emptiness of sense and spirit, not to build it up, for this is the work of God. "The business of God has to be undertaken with great circumspection, and with eyes wide open, most of all in a case of such great importance and a business so sublime as is that

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of these souls, where a man may bring them almost infinite gain if the advice be good, and almost infinite loss if it be mistaken."

It must be recognized that not all directors have sufficient knowledge or experience to enable them to guide all souls, or any soul through all its progress. "Not everyone who can hew a block of wood can carve an image," much less polish and paint it. Do not imagine that because you can guide one soul, you are competent to guide any or all souls, "for God leads each soul along different ways." So do not "tyrannize over souls and deprive them of their liberty, arrogating to yourself the breadth and liberty of evangelical perfection so that not only do you strive that they may not leave you," but if they go to another director, you "behave like a husband who is jealous of his wife" (*L.F.* iii, 30-62).

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Love is all its meaning. Not that passion of which earthly poets sing, but the love which is that of a willed and abiding choice such as the Apostle speaks of when he says that nothing shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, the Divine charity hymned in the thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians, the eternal love of the Father for His Son and for those who "are accepted in the Beloved," being "in Christ," in whom the Father is well pleased. Not that "cupboard love" which loves God for what He has done or for what it can get out of Him, but for what He is in Himself, loves God because He is God all-deserving of love. Such is the love which is and may be commanded by God even before the greatness of His love is manifested at Bethlehem or Calvary, for the first great commandment is given in the Old, not simply in the New Testament, and is based on the fact of what God is rather than on what He does. This St. John knew and taught as he lived and experienced it, he who was truly a victim of love, the joy of which far outweighed the pain, without which no love exists. He had but one thing to do and did it, to love God as He desires to be loved, and found, as will all

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who follow him even afar off and in the way God leads them, that "the soul that walks in love wearies not neither is wearied," and that "love consists not in feeling great things, but in great detachment from things and in suffering for the Beloved." The more we read him, the more we shall understand that all that he has to tell us, may be summed up in one of his maxims :

PRAY TO GOD THAT HIS WILL MAY BE DONE IN THEE
LOVE HIM GREATLY, FOR THIS THOU OWEST HIM.

FROM the earliest days of Christianity, spiritual writers have divided the progress of the Christian towards his end into three stages or ways, which they have called Purgative, Illuminative and Unitive. St. Clement of Alexandria is the first to make this division, describing in his *Stromata* the degrees by which the soul arrives at that knowledge of God, which, our Lord tells us, is eternal life. At the beginning, when a soul is first converted to God, it is ruled largely by the fear of falling back into sin and thus offending God ; later on, it passes into the stage where hope prevails, and the soul, increasing in virtue, desires God, its Sovereign Good ; finally, by many successive steps, it arrives at perfect charity by which God is known and loved for Himself alone and the soul already begins to taste of eternal pleasures. From St. Clement onwards every writer on the Christian life uses this division, developing and amplifying it each in his own way. But it should be noted that whilst the majority use this threefold division as descriptive of the ordinary Christian life in its normal stages, others use the same terms in a restricted sense. Dionysius the Areopagite in the fifth century, and St. John of the Cross in the sixteenth, afford, perhaps, the most notable examples of this restricted use of the traditional terms. Both writers have in mind those who are specially called to "mystic" contemplation : their "beginners," who enter the way of Purification, St. John's *Purification of the Senses*, are not those who are seeking to be purified from mortal sin, but those who, having already attained what is ordinarily called the Way of Illumination, now seek to be entirely purified from the imperfections of the senses by an entire detachment from creatures, and from any adherence even to spiritual things *in themselves*, all being seen as means towards perfect union with God.

But it is of the ordinary use of these terms that I write with the purpose of considering whether the view usually taken of the meaning of the three ways is really most in accord with the actual experience of the Christian soul. It

is not at all uncommon to find that a theory propounded by spiritual writers in which it is very difficult to find any flaw, which often captures the mind by its logical coherence, yet somehow does not fit in with all the facts of human life and experience. The natural tendency on discovering this is to throw away the theory, whereas it will usually be found wiser to retain the substance of it whilst adapting its details to the established facts of life. Further, we shall nearly always find that our discoveries have been anticipated, that, as in this case, the ordinary theory which will be stated in a moment, is not the only one held by approved writers, nor even, sometimes, by those who are commonly supposed to have held and taught it.

Before, however, we come directly to this, it will be well just to underline some essential truths about the normal Christian life. First, that it has but one end : of whatever particular character it may be, its purpose and end is only to be found in union with God by charity. To be made one with God, to see, know, possess and enjoy God, this is eternal life, this is Heaven. That there will be degrees in this final perfection of man is true, for God adapts both grace and glory to the varying capacity with which He has endowed His creatures. But each one will enjoy all the fullness of perfection of which his nature is capable, and so will have no cause for sorrow or envy in seeing others at greater heights than himself. Second, the initial stages of our progress towards this union with God are begun in this life, as also the development of our progress is carried on. What here is not commonly seen is that the point possible to be reached on earth is much higher than it is ordinarily assumed to be, and that many souls could rise nearer to it if they would but use the means. We are too content with mediocrity, with just being "practising" Catholics, too little impressed with the fact that we are "called to be saints," called to perfection, and that there actually are heights of sanctity possible to us in this life, something of the reality of which is told us in the lives of the Saints.

But, third, to none of these highest degrees of the spiritual life belongs essentially such things as ecstasies, locutions, visions, and other extraordinary phenomena which we note in the case of some saints. These things are "extra-

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ordinary," gratuitous graces which have nothing essentially to do with the higher stages of the Christian life.

Turning now to the common view of the meaning of the three ways of the Christian life, it appears as a path divided into three well-defined, separate and successive stages, each one clearly marked off from the other, and each possessing its own peculiar character, efforts and method of prayer. The soul is either in one way *or* the other, as a traveller going to Edinburgh is either between London and Peterborough, *or* Peterborough and York, *or* York and Edinburgh. Beginners are in the way of Purification, their main effort is to avoid sin, to conquer their passions, to gain habits of virtue, their way of prayer is that of Meditation. Proficients are in the way of Illumination, they have won a certain victory over themselves, are ruled more by love for God than love of self or creatures, are seriously and continuously persevering, even if with some relapses, they have reached a higher stage of mental prayer, which is now mainly directed to the mysteries of our Lord's Incarnate life and is largely affective in character. The Perfect are those who have entered upon the Unitive Way, are moved entirely by charity, generous in doing all for God, whom in their prayer they contemplate.

Each of these states succeeds to the other in the degree that the soul gives itself generously to the particular stage of its growth in holiness. There is no time-limit to any one of the three ways, but what the common view insists upon is the fact of their *successiveness* and the rather hard and fast limitations which this implies. The soul is in one way *or* the other, there are no half-tones or shades of gradation, and must practise the exercises of the particular way it is in, especially in the matter of prayer.

Now, as a general view of the normal progress of a persevering soul, all this is true, but only if it is seen as affording a broad indication of that progress without the narrow limitations imposed by some spiritual writers. For if we compare it with the facts of the Christian life in general, or as they may be seen in individual cases, it presents several difficulties, and, if over-forced, tends to hinder the progress of those who are capable of attaining to a high degree of sanctity. And when we read some of the foremost of

theological and ascetic authors, for instance St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, again we find that they afford us another viewpoint, which, while it does not contradict the traditional, somewhat narrow conception of the three ways, yet fits in with and interprets better the normal experience of faithful souls.

The three ways are not strictly successive, as three clearly defined stages of a journey in which one passes out of the first into the second and from the second into the third, but are rather co-existing states or ways which, at least in many characteristics, run parallel, or, better, are interwoven one with the other. What really distinguishes one way from the other is the quality and intensity, at different moments, of the three dominant activities of Purification, Illumination and Union. Beginners are not so much distinguished from those in the higher ways by the use of different means or the exercise of different faculties, but by a more elementary and imperfect use of the same means and faculties, just as a child at school uses the same reason and the same principles as the advanced mathematician, or the amateur painter the same palette, paint and brushes as the trained artist. The difference in both cases consists in the developed comprehension and the facility acquired by study and practice. St. Thomas Aquinas deals with this subject in the ninth article of question twenty-four of the Summa II, II, entitled, *Whether Charity is Rightly Distinguished into Three Degrees, Beginning, Progress and Perfection?* He answers the objections to this division by quoting and commenting on the words of St. Augustine in his Commentary on the first Epistle of St. John, "When charity is born, it takes food, after taking food it waxes strong, and when it has become strong it is perfected." The spiritual growth of charity, he goes on to say, has a certain likeness to bodily growth, which has certain fixed divisions according to the particular activities which are produced by its physical growth. In something of the same manner, what distinguishes one way from another, is the degree in which the soul is habitually ruled by charity, the degree in which its acts are inspired by love of God. In the beginning of the spiritual life, the soul is mainly occupied with avoiding sin, resisting temptations, overcoming its passions, all of which threaten to destroy charity,

and, in order to accomplish this, charity must be nourished, the soul must seek God, Source of its charity, that it may not lose the life it has received. This is the way of Purification in which already, it is to be noted, the love of God is the principal factor, here mainly directed to keeping the soul in a state of grace. *Studium principale est, ne caritas corrumpatur.* In the next stage, the Way of Illumination, the soul's more dominant impulse is to seek after good, the increasing of its charity, not simply to keep in a state of grace but to grow in virtue, *ut in bono proficiant, ut in eis caritas per augmentum roboretur.* With love and desire for God growing in the soul, it advances towards the Unitive way in which its principal aim is directed towards perfect union with God, *ut Deo inhaereat.* We shall return to certain implications in the teaching of St. Thomas later.

The *de Triplici via* of St. Bonaventure is probably the most striking work of the Middle Ages devoted to this subject. In it the Saint, whilst following the traditional order of the progress of the soul, Purification, Illumination, Union, does not confine its acts or its prayer in any one state within certain rigid limits, but sees something of the three ways in each way, i.e. there is something of Illumination and Union in the way of Purification, and so in each way. In his prologue, he calls the three ways "three hierarchal acts," of which "purification gives peace, illumination conducts to the truth, perfection resides in charity. . . . The means of progressing in these three ways are reading, meditation, prayer, contemplation." But he does not present these ways as successive, each with its own particular energies and prayer, but as "hierarchal acts," the substance of which governs each way towards a particular development of the soul's progress. Thus, in each way we find the exercise of the same faculties, "the spur of conscience, the light of the intellect, and the fire of wisdom"; the same means, meditation, prayer, contemplation; upon the same subjects, the consideration of sin, judgment, etc., to the awakening of contrition, of the Truth, as manifested in creatures and in the mysteries of the Incarnation and passion, of our End, which is union with God.

Now, both St. Thomas's teaching that it is charity exercised in varying degrees and directed to particular ends which

determines the soul's progress, and St. Bonaventure's description of the three ways as "hierarchical acts," dominating over the soul in each stage of its progress, are more consonant with both Catholic theology and experience than the stricter interpretation which only treats the ways as successive and gives to each its own kind of prayer, to which the soul is bound to keep. For, actually, whether we think of the spiritual life in its beginning in Holy Baptism or in its awakening in conversion, it is plain that both are initiated by an act of God uniting the soul to Himself and conferring upon it the supernatural light of faith, with the other theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost. To confine ourselves to the *conscious* beginning of the Christian life, that which awakens the soul is always some vision of God, some desire to be other than it is which is always the work of Divine grace. That Union and Illumination tend at first to the purification of the soul, and this is accomplished in the degree of the intensity of its love for God. It is an entire misconception to regard the first efforts of the soul to escape from sin as a merely negative process of its own, by which it can free itself before coming into touch with God, tentative steps, as it were, by which, in our own strength, we set out on a journey in which we may hope to pick up God on the way. The Church insists on the truth that so far as the attaining of eternal life is concerned man has no power of his own to take the smallest step, all begins and continues as it ends with God. Further, the best spiritual guides, among whom may be named St. Teresa and Fr. Baker, tell us that from the very beginning of the Christian life we make far more progress in purifying our souls from sin and in withstanding temptation by contemplating, paying attention to God, than by regarding ourselves and directing all our efforts to self-reformation. And what is true of the beginning is also true of the ordered development of the Christian life. If we need Illumination and Union in order to attain Purification, no less is there a continuous need of Purification to enable us to rise to greater knowledge, love and union with God. It is the whole purpose of the earlier works of St. John of the Cross to show the need of the entire purification of the self in order to attain to its end, and to emphasize the great part contemplation plays in such purification. So

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also Fr. Baker, in a passing reference to the high state of "passive union" of the soul with God, says that such unions, "though they last but even as it were a moment of time, yet do more illuminate and purify the soul than many years spent in active exercises of spiritual prayer or mortification could do."

From this point of view the two main divisions of the prayer life, Discursive Meditation and Contemplation in its primary degree, should not be thought of as altogether excluding each other. They are rather elements in each of the three ways, the difference being in the supremacy and intensity, at different times, of one rather than the others. Or, to put it in another form, meditation not merely purifies but illuminates and purifies by illuminating, contemplation more closely unites the soul to God and by so doing purifies and illuminates. Thus Dom Delatte in his commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict writes, "So from the beginning of our conversion, the work of purgation is achieved by acts of the illuminative and unitive ways, and thus our Transformation in God begins to be realized: 'But we beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image, from glory unto glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord' (2 Cor. iii, 18)." And Fr. Martindale's words may well be quoted, "I distrust very much this slicing of men up as *either* in the 'purgative way,' *or* in the 'illuminative way,' I hold that a soul can very rapidly shrink, as it were, or expand, so as to be in a state of purification as a whole, or of illumination as a whole, alternately; further, that it can be, being on the whole, purified, but *by means of* illumination: or primarily illuminated with a purifying effect."

St. Teresa tells of souls she knew raised to great heights of sanctity by the recitation of vocal prayers, where it is obvious that this was due to the quality of charity infusing what in itself is the lowest form of prayer. In the second volume of his *Studies in the Spanish Mystics*, Professor Allison Peers illustrates the view here advanced from such representative writers as Garcia de Cisneros, Fray Tomas de Jesus and Juan Falconi. The latter quotes P. Gracian as saying in his commentary on St. Bonaventure, that "many souls are in all three Ways at the same time," and Fray Tomas de Jesus says that the principal exercise of the Way

of Purification, which is compunction, cannot "be abandoned even when a soul passes to the Illuminative Way. These two roads, the Purgative and the Illuminative, must be, as it were, one, and thus with greater security, though with less certainty of purgation, the soul will pass to the way of Illumination."

It may be questioned whether any persevering soul remains permanently for any length of time in one way or state. Rather are the ways interwoven, the soul passing in and out and only very slowly dwelling more in one than in the other, even the Unitive Way having its fluctuations, at least until the topmost peak of Spiritual Marriage is reached. Say that the three characteristic notes of the spiritual life are detachment, knowledge and love, and in what stage of the way do we not need them all? The newly-converted sinner kneeling before the crucifix is purified by the light and love which he not only adores but desires to be one with, and, by desiring, is one with. The saint before the same image of Suffering Love, filled and inebriated with the fervour of union with the Sacred Heart, grows in purity and knowledge as he grows in union. So the question is not so much, "What way am I in?" : but, "What motive dominates my whole life?" Am I seeking to be purified in order that I may be illuminated by the Light, possessed by the Love? Am I seeking to be illuminated in order that the Light may accomplish that purification which I cannot do of myself, that emptying of self which alone makes it possible for God to dwell in all His fullness in my soul? Am I desiring an ever-increasing union with God in which He alone shall be my Purity, my Light, my Love? In a word, in what degree does Divine Charity, bond of perfection, rule, direct and govern my whole life?

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